

Bible Class Primers.

EDITED BY

PROFESSOR SALMOND, D.D., ABERDEEN.

THE MIRACLES OF OUR LORD.

BY THE

REV. PROFESSOR LAIDLAW, D.D.,

New College, Edinburgh

BS2419
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1897

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THIS Primer is, in substance, though in greatly reduced form, an adaptation of the Author's fuller work, "The Miracles of our Lord : Expository and Homiletic" (London : Hodder & Stoughton. Third edition. 1896). Those who use the Primer will, at places, only see the full connection of what is here given by referring to the larger work. For teaching purposes, however, the present little book will be found in one respect a distinct improvement upon the former. There the Miracles were arranged on a principle of classification. Here they are given in the generally accepted order of their occurrence in the Gospel Narratives taken as a whole. This will have the advantage of leading the users of it over the "Great Biography"—making it a study of the Life of our Lord from a particular and instructive point of view. In arranging the Paragraphs or Lessons I have not attempted to adhere to the traditional number of thirty-three or thirty-five miracles ; as it is of advantage in one or two cases to group some miracles together in one Lesson. But the result (thirty Lessons or Paragraphs) is very nearly the same.

J. L.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. THE FIRST MIRACLE	9
II. THE HEALING OF THE NOBLEMAN'S SON .	12
III. THE DEMONIAK IN THE SYNAGOGUE; THE HEALING OF PETER'S WIFE'S MOTHER .	16
IV. FIRST MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISHES .	20
V. THE LEPER CLEANSED	23
VI. THE PARALYTIC MADE TO RISE AND WALK	25
VII. THE IMPOTENT MAN OF BETHESDA . .	27
VIII. THE WITHERED HAND	30
IX. THE CENTURION OF GREAT FAITH . .	33
X. THE WIDOW'S SON AT NAIN	36
XI. THE STILLING OF THE TEMPEST . . .	39
XII. THE GADARENE DEMONIAK	42
XIII. THE RAISING OF JAIRUS' DAUGHTER .	45
XIV. THE WOMAN WITH THE ISSUE OF BLOOD .	47
XV. TWO BLIND MEN AND A DUMB DEMON .	50
XVI. FEEDING FIVE THOUSAND	53
XVII. WALKING ON THE WATER	56
XVIII. THE SYROPHENICIAN'S DAUGHTER .	58
XIX. THE DEAF MAN OF DECAPOLIS . . .	61
XX. FEEDING FOUR THOUSAND	63

	PAGE
XXI. THE BLIND MAN AT BETHSAIDA . . .	65
XXII. THE EPILEPTIC BOY	68
XXIII. THE COIN IN THE FISH'S MOUTH . . .	71
XXIV. THE MAN BORN BLIND	73
XXV. THE WOMAN WITH A SPIRIT OF INFIR- MITY AND THE DROPSICAL MAN . . .	76
XXVI. TEN LEPERS CLEANSED	80
XXVII. BLIND BARTIMEUS	83
XXVIII. THE RAISING OF LAZARUS.	86
XXIX. THE WITHERING OF THE FIG TREE. . .	88
XXX. THE SECOND MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISHES	90

INTRODUCTORY.

1. The PURPOSE of our Lord's Miracles has been usually stated as furnishing evidence of the Divinity of His Person, and as producing credentials of His Mission, or seals to the Divineness of His Revelation. In a general sense this definition is true ; but so stated it is crude, and as often expounded it is worse than crude. It tends to obscure the grand fact which all the Gospel Miracles illustrate—the Incarnation. It is worth while to note the exclamation which, according to the Evangelists, several of them elicited from the actual beholders of them ; “What manner of man is this?” Our answer, with all the aids of Christian history, ought to be—“This is the God-man, the Word made flesh.” If we follow the obvious classification of the Miracles into those wrought upon Nature, and those wrought upon Man, we shall arrive at a more discriminating and instructed answer to the question of their purpose than the vague and general one above cited.

1. The Nature-Miracles bear a special relation to the person and work of Jesus. They were comparatively few. Probably all that were wrought by Him are recorded. They are not like the Healing-Miracles, samples out of a mass which remain untold. Further, they are entirely peculiar to Jesus. Apostles healed the sick, and even raised the dead, but they never turned water into wine, nor walked the waves. This class of miracles must have in them an element evidentially unique. They show Jesus as more than prophet, or Divine messenger in a delegated sense. They are better than proofs of His

Godhead, they are the *insignia* of His God-manhood. They illustrate the idea of Psalm viii., as interpreted in Hebrews ii. In them we see the Son of Man under whose feet all things are placed, to whom all power over the Universe of Nature is given for the sake of His Divine mission and the establishing of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth. The Nature-Miracles are usually reckoned as nine in all—The First Miracle at Cana ; Simon's Draught of Fishes ; Stilling the Storm ; Feeding Five Thousand ; Walking on the Water ; The Second Miraculous Feeding ; The Coin in the Fish's Mouth ; The Withering of the Fig-tree ; The Second Draught of Fishes in John xxi.

2. The Healing-Miracles again, and those usually classed with them bear more directly on the fact that Jesus came into the world to redeem. They are more than mere evidence of His power and commission to redeem,—far more than figures or emblems of redemption. They were in themselves an integral part of His redemption work. When He cared for sick people and restored them to health ; when He recalled the lunatic and the maniac to quietness and sanity ; when He set the "possessed" free from the yoke of demons, He was claiming man's entire nature,—body, mind, and spirit, for redemption ; He was doing a part of the same redeeming work which He completed when He drew men from their sinful life into pardon and peace with God. In a number of instances, express dealings of His with these healed ones as to their deliverance from sin are recorded. It was as the Friend of man and the Saviour of sinners that He did His miracles of healing. The one Gospel of glad tidings is preached in our Lord's deeds of mercy and in His words of truth. The healing ministry was, in short, a proclamation of redemption ; and though far more than a mere "bid" for men's attention, it was intended to call their atten-

tion to what was more necessary for man than his temporary rescue from physical ills. It proclaimed that the Christ had come to work out a whole salvation of man from evil, root and branch,—that He came as the Physician of a sin-sick world. The recorded Healing-Miracles are some twenty or twenty-two in number, but these are evidently a mere handful of the scores or hundreds of the like which He wrought. On the other hand the three raisings from the dead, like the Miracles on Nature, are pretty plainly all that He saw fit to do in that kind.

II. The DISTRIBUTION of the Miracle-narratives in the several Gospels is a topic of some moment, but nothing more can be done here than to indicate the facts. *Eleven* Miracles belong to what is called the triple tradition, *i.e.*, they occur in all the Synoptic Gospels. And it is significant that this group includes at least one specimen of each class of our Lord's wonderful works; *e.g.*, Two Nature-miracles—the Storm-stilling and the Feeding Five Thousand (which is also recorded in the Fourth Gospel); Eight Healing-miracles—two of them being instances of demon-expulsion; and one restoration from the dead—the raising of Jairus' daughter. These eleven therefore are typical and help to accredit those narratives in other Gospels, where other instances but no other kinds of miracles are recorded.

There is one demon-expulsion common to *Mark* and *Luke*, *viz.* : that in the Synagogue at Capernaum. There are three narratives common to *Matthew* and *Mark* : The Syrophenician's Daughter, the Feeding of Four Thousand, and the Withering of the Fig-tree. The Walking on the Water is also three times recorded, *viz.*, in *Matthew*, *Mark* and *John*.

Peculiar to *Matthew* are the opening of the eyes of the two blind men who followed him into the house, and the casting out of a dumb demon which

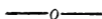
is related in close consecution to it (Matt. ix.). Perhaps also peculiar to the first Gospel is the very briefly told Miracle of the Blind and Dumb possessed (ch. xii. 22), although this may also be the incident alluded to in Luke xi. 14, where blindness, however, is not mentioned. The similarity of the passages rests mainly on the incident giving occasion in both Gospels to the discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees as to the source of His power in that direction. This is not made a separate lesson in our sketch. Also in Matthew only occurs—The Coin in the Fish's Mouth (ch. xvii.).

Peculiar to *Mark* are the Blind Man at Bethsaida (ch. viii.), and the Deaf Man at Decapolis (ch. vii.).

Peculiar to *Luke* are Simon's Miraculous Draught of Fishes (ch. iv.), The Widow's Son at Nain (ch. vii.), The Woman bent together (ch. xiii.), The Dropsical Man (ch. xiv.), The Ten Lepers cleansed (ch. xvii.), and the healing of Malchus' ear (ch. xxii.), an incident not expanded as a separate lesson.

Peculiar to the *Fourth Gospel* are the Water turned to Wine (ch. ii.), the Cure of the Courtier's Son (ch. iv.), the Man at the pool of Bethesda (ch. v.), the Man born blind (ch. ix.), the Raising of Lazarus (ch. xi.), and the second Miraculous Draught of Fishes (ch. xxi.). The obvious peculiarity of those recorded in this Gospel is their introduction in almost every instance for a didactic purpose. They are followed by some lesson, discussion, or discourse.

THE MIRACLES OF OUR LORD.



I. The First Miracle (John ii. 1-12).

1. *The Time, Place, and Occasion* (vv. 1-5). Vv. 1, 2.—The opening words link this narrative to that of the preceding chapter. “The third day” is likely counted from the day named in chap. i. 43, when Jesus set out with His first five disciples to go into Galilee. They were now come to the little town there, to which Nathanael, the latest convert of the five, belonged. Here, at a marriage-feast, was found the “mother of Jesus,” apparently in some charge of it; perhaps related to the bridal pair. On her account Jesus and His followers were asked and went in. Jesus at a wedding party!—not hindering but helping true human gladness. He is no enemy, neither is His Gospel, to cheerfulness and innocent joy, to the pleasures of society and friendship, far less to human affection. He honoured and beautified marriage by His presence, and by His first miracle being wrought on such an occasion. Vv. 3, 4.—The giving-out of the supply was perhaps due to the unexpected addition to the company made by His arrival with His following, and this led His mother at once to tell Him about

it. She had a belief that He would do something to the purpose ; not only the lesser one of relieving the situation, but the greater one of showing forth His glory. His answer was not harsh, but it had some grave hints in it. He says, "Woman," not "Mother," because (as we shall see) He had to disengage Himself at the beginning of His public ministry from merely private and family ties. But the name is not stern. He uses it again on the Cross (John xix. 26), when in the act of providing a son and a home for Mary ; and the words which follow mean, "You and I don't see this quite in the same way ; you would like a big, startling display of my glory as Messiah, but for that the time is not yet come." For all this, Mary read into His words her own sense, which was not really wrong. So she said to the servants, "Be ready to do whatever He tells you, and you will see something."

2. *The manner of the Miracle* (vv. 6-10). (a) It was a real turning of water into wine (compare chap. iv. 46). It was not making the guests think that the water He sent them was wine. It was a genuine creation, production, or miraculous change of material. How it was done we cannot guess. It was a direct divine work, and therefore wholly beyond our powers of explanation. But it was done, and the wine was real, and of the best which the vines of that country could have produced, as the playful remark of the man at the head of the table shows. Many of the mixtures used under the name of "wine" now, have nothing to do with grapes or vineyards.

(b) It was done in a way so quiet that nobody

knew about it except His mother, the servants, and the disciples. There were large jars standing outside for water to wash in ; these He bade the servants fill, amounting to a good many gallons. Water it was, and water it remained. Then, all this being seen to be pure water, He bade them "draw out" for the guests, either out of the filled water-jars, or from the original well. When the guests tasted what was taken to them it was wine, and of the best. The servants knew that nothing but water was drawn. Those at the table only knew that what they drank was wine. Thus there was no prodigy ; no solemn pause and magic transformation before a gaping company. Only those who were in the secret knew of it at all, and were conscious of His glory. Whatever fame of it leaked out by-and-bye, no immediate stir was made by it, and none was intended.

3. *The purpose and meaning of the Miracle* (v. 11). This is brought out by the place which the Evangelist accords to it in the forefront of our Lord's public ministry. (a) To mark the transition from the *Old* to the *New*. The Baptist, His immediate forerunner, was a hermit and an ascetic. "The Son of Man came eating and drinking." Moses' first miracle was one of judgment—turning water into blood. Jesus begins His miracles with one of bounty and kindness. And this has a meaning deeper still : "The law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (chap. i. 17). (b) To be a sample and symbol of all Christ's work for men, to "manifest forth" His peculiar glory. He came to serve others. He who would make no

bread for His own hard hunger (see the Temptation narrative) supplied this wedding-party with wine out of His social and family kindness. He came not only to save and to give mere life, but more abundance. His gospel and His spirit turn the water of human existence into the wine of His new kingdom of heaven.

LESSONS.—Besides the *general* one, about Christ being no “kill-joy,” but rather making all our true delight, better and more sacred, notice these *special* ones :—

(1) Those who work for Christ and follow Him, see His way and His glory—not the mere lookers on. Compare v. 9, “but the servants knew,” etc., with v. 11, “His disciples believed on Him.”

(2) Sin and the world give what they call their “good” first ; afterwards that which is “worse.” Jesus gives His best last (v. 10).

(3) The way of the world turns good into bad and worse. The way of Christ turns good into better and best.

II. The Healing of the Nobleman's Son (John iv. 43-54).

This Fourth Gospel recounts a brief visit of Jesus to Jerusalem at the First Passover of His public ministry, and then His return journey through Samaria (John ii. 13 ; iv. 43). Now we have Him back in Galilee and beginning again His works of mercy in the same little town of Cana, where His first miracle had been wrought. The remark in v. 44 calls for explanation. Some think it means He chose Galilee rather than Judea, because, though He was born in Judea, He was not honoured there.

But Judea is never elsewhere called "His own country"; always Galilee. The other and better explanation depends on v. 45. In His youth, and at the beginning of His ministry His own country-folks of Galilee had thought nothing of him; but now, since he had been up at the capital, and been heard of there, and people of His own place had been there too and brought back the report, Galilee received Him as it had never done before. His honour began to sound forth from another district than His own; but now the echo of it had come to be heard even there.

This is the first of Jesus' miracles of healing; and probably because these were so important and influential in Galilee, John records at length this one which has not been given in the miracle-narratives of the other three Gospels. It fitly heads the list, as it makes so emphatic the link between Miracle and Faith. In all these healings Jesus takes the utmost pains to call out faith on the part of those to be healed, or (as in this case) those who sought healing for their dear ones. Notice the instructive variety which these narratives give us, of kinds and actions of faith. Sometimes Jesus is tenderly directing a weak faith. Again, by apparent refusal, He is drawing into view the strength of a strong faith. Another time, teaching that miracle is not the cause of faith so much as its reward; that bodily cures are chiefly of use to bring spiritual help; that belief in Him as a healer is meant to lead men to faith in Him as a Saviour.

1. *The case stated* (vv. 46, 47).—The man who came from Capernaum to Cana (twenty miles) to ask

Jesus to go down and heal his child is called a "nobleman," or courtier, or king's officer, most likely therefore connected with the only king in these parts,—Herod of Galilee. His young son was in a fever. The courtier perhaps had some previous acquaintance with the fame of Jesus; at all events, the news mentioned in v. 45 had reached him and quickened his expectation that Jesus could save his son's life. Accordingly he came to ask that He would at once, for the case was urgent, go down with him to Capernaum for the purpose.

2. *Jesus draws out desire by seeming to repel the request* (vv. 48, 49).—The words "*Except*," etc., are both *corrective* and *educative* in their purpose. It was not the request for healing that He demurred to meet. It was a mistaken idea He wanted to *correct*; as if He were a sort of magician, a miracle-monger, who must make a hurry and fuss and hasten to the sick bed, and strike His hand over the patient, and so on. Also, it was meant to *educate* the faith of this man, and lead him to a higher kind than that which depends upon actual wonders paraded before men's eyes. Jesus says the best kind of faith is when men have not seen and yet believe in Him (John xx. 29). The treatment succeeds. The father comes out with an earnest and touching appeal. "I don't want signs and wonders," he says; "I just want my boy saved any way." The faith is not quite strong or clear yet; for he still thinks Jesus must come down to Capernaum to do the cure. But it is earnest and hearty, and that is what Jesus likes.

3. *Jesus puts faith to the test and rewards it when tested* (vv. 50, 53).—The meaning of the words (ver. 50, "Go thy way," etc.) is this: "You say you don't care about signs and seeing them, but just that your son may be healed. Well then, your son *is* healed, without your seeing it. The thing is done already without any sign. Can you trust Me for that?" The courtier says, "Yes; I believe it entirely. I take your word for it and ask no more; not even that you should move a step from the spot." And to show that he did thoroughly believe Jesus, he quietly acted on it, and "went his way." The reward of this faith, so successfully tested, came to him on the way home. The news met him on the road. The time of the cure was found exactly to coincide with the time when Jesus uttered the word. The whole was crowned, not only by the boy's recovery, but by the conversion of the courtier and his household to the faith of Christ.

4. Notice the *degrees* by which faith mounts in this case—(a) It begins with such confidence in the testimony about Jesus as to make the man take this twenty mile journey; (b) His faith mounts a quite other height when he trusts to the word of Jesus that the thing is done, though he hasn't seen it. (c) When all this is confirmed by the fact of the instant and miraculous cure of his son, faith mounts to the highest stage; he and his family accept Jesus as their Saviour and the Christ of God.

LESSONS.—1. The steps of faith. Jesus welcomes even weak faith, the smallest grain of it, and takes pains to make it grow. 2. Faith helps faith. What of it there is in you will help those around you; if

you only let it be really felt. It becomes fruitful, especially to those closest to us. This man's "whole house" went with him in the faith of Christ. 3. The variety in Christ's ways of dealing with us. This man got the blessing in a way different from what he expected, and unknown up to that time. We should not be surprised or cast down if things, in our spiritual experience, should be very different from that of others, or entirely new in our own.

III. The Demoniac in the Synagogue. The Healing of Peter's Wife's Mother, etc. (A Sabbath Day's Work).
(Luke iv. 30-41; Mark i. 23-35; Matt. viii. 14-17).

The whole passage, especially as given in Luke and Mark, presents a remarkable view of our Lord's labours on one single day, and that a Sabbath. In the earlier part of the day He goes to the Synagogue, teaches there with great impression, and deepens it by the first instance of His power over one "possessed with a demon." In the after part of the day He raises Peter's mother-in-law from her fevered bed to perfect health. Later on the same evening the afflicted people of the whole town are gathered round the door, and He heals them all. The night's rest which followed must have been of the briefest, for He rose next morning long before day-break and retired into the desert for prayer. Thus, the narrative allows us to follow His footsteps for about twenty-four hours on end, and gives us a glimpse into the wondrous activities of His ministry.

1. The Demoniac in the Synagogue (Luke iv. 31-

37).—Our Lord had just got some of His disciples about Him, and with them as His followers He immediately commenced His teaching and healing ministry. He had now fixed upon Capernaum as the centre of it, and so He began there, and made it His special care to preach on the Sabbath. Thus at the outset Jesus took possession both of the Sabbath Day and of the Synagogue. He was Lord of both. So, before He was done with them, He had turned the old Sabbath into the new Lord's Day, and the Jewish Synagogue into the Christian meeting. From this first instance began the astonishment of the people at His "teaching" (ver. 32). Both the matter and manner were new, especially the last. It was so plain and fresh and different from the dry hair-splitting of the Scribes. Above all, it had a majesty and force which sprang from the person of the speaker, Himself the Truth. His word was with authority (Luke iv. 33, 34). — As He was thus teaching, the discourse was strangely interrupted. A voice burst out—a shriek, rather—that stopped the sermon and appalled the audience, "*Let alone! Go away, Jesus of Nazareth! Art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God.*" Unnoticed perhaps by those in charge of the meeting, one of these unhappy creatures, "the possessed," had crept in, and the Evil One tried, through him, to break the spell of the Master's words and bring discredit on His work. v. 35.—Jesus was not to be taken at unawares. "*Hold thy peace,*" He said. He will have no testimony from such a quarter (compare v. 41; also Mark i. 34, iii. 12; Acts xvi. 18).

Then, addressing the unclean spirit as distinct from the man, he added, "*Come out of Him.*" This word, like His teaching, had "authority." For, when the demon had thrown his victim into violent fits, had hurled him with a convulsive leap into the midst of the astonished congregation, and had uttered a cry of helpless rage, he came out, and left the man prostrate but unhurt. This instance so clearly marked out Jesus as the Destroyer of the works of the Devil and the Deliverer of men, that it is no wonder to find the whole town and neighbourhood at His feet before that Sabbath day was ended.

2. *Simon's wife's mother* (Luke iv. 38, 39).—As soon as the Synagogue service was over, Jesus went into the house of Simon, which was near. Before He sat down to refresh Himself with His disciples at table, He had another work of mercy to do. The elder lady of the house was down of a fever. Luke, the beloved physician, gives us its technical name. It was the "big" or "great" fever. Mark informs us (i. 30, 31) of two incidents of the story not given here: (a) That Jesus was told about the case as soon as He entered the house, and Luke adds that the household asked Him to cure her. Often Jesus healed people of His own motion and mercy; but He also liked to be *asked* to do it. And it is so still (Matt. vii. 7). (b) Mark says He accompanied the cure with a specific action—"He took her by the hand and lifted her up" (i. 31). This action of the touch, or the laying on of His hands, was a frequent one with Him, though not invariable. It seems to have been His method all this first great

day of healings, as we read here in v. 40. We may read it, as giving to the cures a sort of sacramental character. He laid His hand even upon lepers, though never, so far as we read, upon demoniacs. (c) Another feature of this cure given in all three Gospels is the immediate and entire recovery of the patient, which was proved by the good dame's being able to help at the meal, which was now served. How natural and beautiful this "home-specimen" of Jesus' healing power. It was not in large public gatherings only that He did miracles. His charity emphatically began at home.

3. *Cure of all the sick in a whole town* (Luke iv. 40, 41).—The miracles of the day soon spread their report through the place, and before nightfall the whole city "was gathered together at the door" of Simon's house. Those who had heard of the *forenoon* miracle in the Synagogue brought all the "possessed" persons they could get, and "He cast out the demons, not suffering them to speak," *i.e.*, as much as possible repressed them for the reasons above given. Again, the miracle of the *afternoon*—instant and entire cure of fever—suggested that He would be able to heal every sort of disease. Forthwith, the entire ailing persons of the town were brought to Him. They waited till sunset, indeed, perhaps for the coolness; but also because of their scruples about carrying or curing on Sabbath. For at the setting of the sun the Sabbath ended. Jesus did not agree with them about that, as He soon showed. Yet he respected their scruples, but spared not His own body. He began afresh, and carried on probably far into the night His toilsome work,

until it could be literally said that He had "healed them all."

LESSONS.—1. Jesus cast out demons, because He came to destroy Satan's kingdom and set up the Kingdom of God.

2. He healed diseases, because He came to save us from our sins. It is here that Matthew brings in Isaiah's word, "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses" (Matt. viii. 17), because first the Lord "laid on Him the iniquities of us all" (Is. liii. 6).

IV. First Miraculous Draught of Fishes (The Call of the Fishermen). (Luke v. 1-11.)

1. *The Scene* (vv. 1-3). In last lesson we had a Sabbath day's labours of Jesus. Here we have a delightful glimpse of His week-day or every-day work. One morning He is walking on the shore of the lake. The people see Him and rush together in crowds to hear Him. This brings Him to a standstill. He looks round for some place where there is room and height to speak from. His eye lights upon an empty boat drawn upon the land,—that of his disciple Simon Peter. He enters and asks Simon to push her off a little, so as to command the audience. Then, with the prow for His pulpit, He teaches the people clustered before Him on the sloping beach. This is week-day ministry, open-air preaching, an off-hand service; just as before we had Jesus conducting the regular course of public worship on the Sabbath in the Synagogue. It was immediately after this, that the deed or sign followed which is the subject of our lesson. It shows well how every-

day religion helps every-day work. Simon had waited on Jesus at his preaching and lent his boat for a platform. Jesus now helps Simon at his fishing, with an astonishing result.

2. *The Sign, or Miracle* (vv. 4-7). Jesus rewards these helpers of His by a blessing on their own natural work. A great "take of fish," at an occasional time, is not of itself miraculous; but that this was a designed miracle appears from Peter's words in v. 5. He says, that if left to his own knowledge and experience as a fisherman, he would not have cast the net. As much as to say, whatever is caught at this time, happens not by chance, or according to mere nature, but because of Christ's bidding. Therefore it was an act of His Sovereignty and Christhood. How He wrought the miracle is not for us to say, but we call it a Nature-miracle as the work of the Son of God, of Whom and by Whom are all things in the Universe; and a Christ-miracle as showing that all things are put under the Son of Man to use for His Kingdom's sake (compare Ps. viii. 6-8 with Heb. ii. 8).

3. *The effects* (vv. 8-11) were these—(a) an impression of astonishment on all who witnessed it, so that the miracle was a seal to the whole neighbourhood of Jesus' Divine Commission and of the truth of His teaching which they had just heard (v. 9). Then (b) a spiritual crisis in the soul of Peter (v. 8). He had been gradually learning more of Jesus in the previous weeks or months (See John i. and ii.). Now it suddenly bursts upon him Who it is that sits beside him in his own boat. It is none other than the Lord God of Israel. Next comes the thought,

"How can such as Peter serve and dwell with Israel's Holy One?" He falls down at Jesus' knees, and in the confused feeling of this overwhelming moment, he cries, "Depart from me ; I am a sinful man and Thou art Lord and God." Jesus answers at once with His "Fear not." "Depart ! no, never !" It is just such sinful men, come to themselves, that Jesus wants, through whom to gain others. These are the degrees or steps, in His college, for His ministers and workers. (1) A real sight of God. (2) A deep sense, therefore, of their own sinfulness. (3) A conviction that the Lord has got hold of them for His own service. Trace these degrees in Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Saul of Tarsus, as the Bible describes their experiences, and see how like to that of Peter here. Then you may trace it beyond Bible history in many a Christian biography.

(c) A complete surrender and prompt decision on the part of all the four disciples present on this occasion (v. 11). No doubt, they had all been met and dealt with by Jesus before this ; but this was the deed followed by the word, which brought their conversion to a head. They took now the decisive step, left their boats and nets, and put themselves under Jesus to be trained for the Ministry. This was the call of the Fisher-Apostles, to be Fishers of men. How fit the miracle to lead up to this result which Jesus had purposed ! By a great catch of fish, He caught the fishermen. None were so prepared to judge the greatness of the miracle as they. No kind of miracle was so fitted to impress "toilers of the deep" like them. So He took them, as it were, in

their own net. How constantly we see this principle at work in the Gospel story ! The Lord meets His converts in the way of their own walk and work. The wise men from the East, whose business and delight were to study the heavens, were guided to Jesus by a star. The woman that came to Sychar's well at noon for water went home with the water of life eternal springing up in her soul. Those who followed Jesus for bread, because they had seen the loaves multiplied, were taught that He was the Bread from heaven.

LESSON.—Analogy between the work of *fishers* and that of the *workers* for *souls*. In both, there must be *art* and *skill*, *patience* and *toil*. The fisher "takes his prey *alive*," and Jesus here uses exactly this word, to express the winning of men to His Kingdom.

V. The Leper Cleansed (Matt. viii. 14-17 ; Mark i. 40-45 ; Luke v. 12-16).

As in last paragraph we had a *Nature* Miracle, now we have two closely following instances of Christ's *Healing* Miracles. These have always a reference to His Saviour-work, for diseases are at once effects and emblems of sin. In the case of the leper, there is proof given of Jesus removing the *pollution* of sin ; in that of the paralytic, delivering from its *power* or *bondage*.

I. (vv. 12-16). *The disease itself* was a loathsome and disfiguring affection of the skin. It is very often mentioned in the Bible, though it ought not to be confounded with the more terrible disease, of the same name, known in mediæval and modern times. A chief point in its use in Bible teaching is

the fact that in the Mosaic Law, it was treated as a defilement or uncleanness, separating those who had it from society. But it was not, like its modern namesake, either certainly fatal or absolutely incurable. To dispel it in a moment, as Jesus did, was, however, utterly beyond the power of man and therefore a true miracle. The Bible treats leprosy as an emblem of *sin*, in its aspect of pollution or defilement. Notice how, in its removal, it is never said to be *cured* or *healed*, but always *cleansed*.

2. *This man's case and his prayers* (v. 12). It was a very bad case; "he was full of leprosy." When he met Jesus in the public road or street, everybody drew back in horror. Only Jesus stood still. The sufferer "knelt down," "fell on his face" before Him, called Him "Lord"; in short, as Matthew has it, "worshipped Him." "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean," he cried. We are not to think his faith was wanting because he said "If Thou wilt." He fully believed Christ's power. Only, as he was the first "leper" that came to Jesus, he could not know whether He would be pleased to treat such cases. He was sure that if He pleased He could do it. That was faith enough for Jesus' purpose.

3. *The Lord's answer* (v. 13). First, a *deed*, then a *word*, and the thing was done. Such a deed! He put forth His hand and *touched* him. The first thing Jesus did here was the last thing that any other would have dreamt of doing. To *touch* a leper was defilement and social death. But here is the Lord of life and the Conqueror of death. He reaches forth the hand of the Brother, Healer, and

Saviour of men. He accompanies the *deed* with the kingly *word*, "I will." "You had no doubt of my *power*, you shall now be made sure of my *willingness*." And immediately the disease left him.

4. *The Lord's command* (v. 14) to the cleansed man was twofold ; (a) to keep it quiet meanwhile, probably because of the too great stir it would make ; (b) to go through the regular legal process of getting himself declared clean by the priests, that the cure might be properly witnessed and confirmed. The man appears to have done neither, and thus occasioned his Healer much immediate annoyance, and, perhaps, ultimate danger. Zeal in converts, without discretion, often does harm to Christ's cause.

VI. The Paralytic made to rise and walk (vv. 17-26).

1. *How the patient was brought to the Healer* (vv. 17-19). This cure was done not on the open road or street, as in the former cure, but in a house. The house was filled to the door with people listening to Jesus—rooms, passages, central court, all crowded. Four men came carrying their palsied friend. How to get him in? First they mounted by an outside stair, or through the next house, on to the flat roof. Then, with ropes, they let him down on his bed, having first lifted off some part of the tiling, or, perhaps, a projecting verandah—a proof of their faith in Jesus, and their determination to get their friend healed.

2. *Christ pardons the man's sins before He gives power to his body* (vv. 20-25). Imagine the sermon stopped,—the whole congregation look-

ing eagerly on; the Scribes and Pharisees present particularly watchful. Then their further astonishment when Jesus, instead of curing the man of his palsy, says, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee." "What blasphemy!" thought his enemies, "He professes to forgive sin, which belongs to God alone." But, reading their thought, Jesus says again, "Which is easier to *say* (not easier to *do*), what every rabbi or so-called priest would, 'your sin is forgiven,' or what none of them would dare to say to a palsied man, 'Rise up and walk?'" But He adds, I will prove my power or right to say and do both. So, turning to the man, He bids him "take up his bed," and the man went forth strong and hale before them all. Among all the many miracles done in Capernaum [see Paragraph III.] none struck the people with such amazement and produced such praise to God (v. 26) as this. Because it proved that Jesus was not only the Healer of men's bodies, but the Saviour of their souls, and the Forgiver of their sins—was, in short, the Christ of God.

3. The spiritual meaning of the miracle, *Pardon sealed by Power*. Just as the cleansing of the leper presents Jesus as taking away the filth and defilement of our sins, this miracle presents Him as cancelling the bondage of sin, and raising us from its moral weakness. Note, too, the course He takes—first, pardon, then power. Whenever He says, "Your sin is forgiven," He says also, "Rise up and walk." He never leaves His pardoned ones under the paralysing yoke of sin. When He frees us from its guilt, He delivers us also from its service.

GENERAL LESSON.—From both V. and VI. gather how Jesus honoured *faith* in connection with all His healings. The leper who had faith to say confidently, "*Thou canst* make me clean," had his reward. The paralytic and the four men who had faith to carry their friend over all these obstacles into Jesus' presence, got their reward. "When He *saw their faith*," etc. (v. 20).

VII. The Impotent Man of Bethesda (John v. 1-18).

I. *At the Pool* (vv. 2-9). Our Lord was walking in Jerusalem on a Sabbath morning. He was passing a large tank or bath surrounded by covered porches, in which sick people lay waiting for those periods when the waters had a special curative effect. Most scholars now think that v. 4, which ascribes that effect to an angel-visit, does not belong to the text, but was a traditional account of the cause. In some way, however, the waters when moved had a peculiar power.

Jesus got His eye on the worst case in that open-air hospital—a man who had been entirely helpless for thirty-eight years. His face wore the dull look that comes from "hope deferred." Jesus knew all about him, stopped, caught his gaze, roused him with the sudden question, "Do you really want to get better?" The man hastened to defend himself. "Yes! I wish it much; but I am so friendless that I never can get a chance of going into the pool when the waters are at their best; I have no man to help me in."

Then, having thus got his attention, Jesus next addressed him with a look and tone which carried

indescribable power, "*Rise, take up thy bed, and walk!*" The man at once felt that this Unknown One was no common being. What would have been mockery from other lips, he received as truth and life from His. The patient asked no questions, started no objections; never said, "to rise and walk is the very thing I can't do," though that would have been true enough. He just did as his Deliverer bade him, and was healed in the act of doing it. He leaped up, took the poor mass of rags, on which he had lain, under his arm, and marched away. Most likely he would have left it there if his Healer had not told him expressly to take it up (*a*) as a proof of his complete recovery, that he could not only walk, but carry his couch; (*b*) as a mark of identity, to prove that he was the very man who had lain so long helpless there; (*c*) as a test of his faith in his Healer, and thankfulness to Him. He had such entire trust as to do exactly what He bade him.

2. *On the street* (vv. 10-13).—We follow the man now from the scene of his cure to the scene of his trial. It was his carrying his bed on the Sabbath which brought it on. Had he gone away light and free no one would likely have noticed him. Had he been carrying his bed on an ordinary day he would also probably have escaped notice. But his action on this day arrested so much attention that the religious authorities—whom the Gospel-writer here (v. 10) calls "the Jews"—interfered. "You can't do that to-day," they said, "it is not lawful." Strangely blind these rulers must have been. They could see nothing of the cure that had been wrought, but only, "Here's a man breaking the Sabbath."

Ver. 11. The man's answer, "He who cured me told me to do this." Simple and straightforward faith! "He who wrought such merciful and marvellous healing could surely never bid me do anything really wrong." Wise and firm-footed reasoning. (Compare that of the blind man in chap. ix.)

Ver. 12. The answer had no effect on "the Jews." They only wanted to know who it was that had caused him to do it. They asked not, "Who cured thee? Tell us who is this wonderful and merciful Healer," but, "Who is he that told thee to carry a bed on the Sabbath?" An instance of the blindest bigotry. They had formed certain rules of their own not contained in God's commandment about the Sabbath, and by these rules they judged all other men. No miracle of healing which the Unknown One had wrought must weigh against their judgment that He had broken the Sabbath. At this time the man was not able to tell them who had healed him. When he afterwards found out and told them, their bigoted judgment remained the same and their hatred of Jesus became still greater. Especially when He told them (v. 17) that their small, paltry Sabbath-keeping was quite contrary to that of the Almighty Creator and Preserver, who gave them the Sabbath. "The God of the Sabbath," Jesus said, "Who was also His Father, was constantly doing works of mercy and of might on the Sabbath day. So must also the Son do the like works."

3. *In the Temple* (vv. 14, 15).—The Healer and the healed meet once more, this time in God's House. The man had gone to the Temple so soon

as he was free from his burden and his questioners, full of thankful thoughts after eight-and-thirty years of enforced absence ; another proof that he was a fit subject of the Lord's healing. Jesus went thither also, doubtless for the purpose of meeting the man and completing the inward and spiritual cure. When they met, Jesus (v. 14) gave him (a) a reminder and confirmation of blessing received. "*Thou art made whole.*" We so soon forget what Christ bestows, that continual counsel and confirmation from His lips are needed. (b) A tender and faithful warning. "*Sin no more lest,*" etc. As on a former occasion of healing, Jesus brought out the connection between *pardon* and *power*, so here He reminds us of the link between *sin* and *suffering*. He pointed to the profound law that in such cases as this man's the cure is really moral and spiritual as much as physical. He says to him in effect, "Though I have now lifted you up from your 'mattress-grave' you are not cured unless you cease from sin. My cures are of body and soul together. My word avails for both. As effectual as 'Rise and walk' was for the one, shall 'Sin no more' be for the other, when heard and received in your inmost spirit." Not to sin, to be no more a sinner, is the law of a Christian's heart and life ; because it is his Saviour's command.

VIII. The Withered Hand (Matt. xii. 9-14 ; Mark iii. 1-6 ; Luke vi. 6-11).

It is plain that the two incidents, "The plucking of the ears of corn" and "The healing of the man with the withered hand," are put together by Luke

as also by Matthew and Mark, to illustrate our Lord's explanation and defence of the Sabbath law. They respectively set forth the two classes of exceptions against the overstrained application of the Divine command, "Thou shalt do no work on that day." *Necessity* covers the first instance and *mercy* the second.

1. *The Case* (Luke vi. 6). "It was on another Sabbath" (*i.e.*, than that of the corn plucking), and in the Synagogue itself that this second incident took place. Another of the traditional additions of the Jews to the Divine commandment,—Hedges of the Law, as they called them—was that no doctor's work was to be done on the Sabbath. So they were always ready to object to Jesus' miracles of healing done on that day. After that first great crowd of happy cures which He wrought on a Sabbath day in Capernaum (see paragraph III.), they began to watch Him. Some think that they had expressly got this man to come to the Synagogue on this occasion, and so set a trap for Jesus. But if so, Jesus rescued both the man and Himself. The man's disease was what is called a "local atrophy," *i.e.*, a wasting or shrinking of one part of a limb. Tradition says he was a bricklayer who came and besought Jesus for a cure that he might be able to work for his bread. To this Luke's remark that it was the "right hand," lends some colour. Disabled as the man was, he was found at the place of public worship on the Sabbath and got a blessing there.

2. *The Question* (vv. 7-9). The narrative says nothing about the Jews having put the man there, far less that he said or did anything himself to gain

Jesus' notice. But the enemies of Jesus knew the man was present, expected that Jesus would cure him and "watched" accordingly. Thus out of His abundant goodness they basely wanted to construct a snare for Him. But He knew their thought, and so far from avoiding it, went straight to the point. He said to the man, "Rise up and stand forth in the midst," *i.e.*, He put him where all could see,—making the miracle more public than usual, just because His enemies had made it a test or trial case. The man silently and promptly did as he was told: a proof of his faith. By his prompt obedience he took the side of Jesus against the Pharisees,—obeyed God rather than men.

Then Jesus, having got the attention of the whole meeting fixed, put His question; and as always is the case, by putting it *rightly* (not wrongly as they did) makes it, as it were, answer itself. Not, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do some part of doctor's work?" Let the doctors settle that with their own Master. But, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day? or, Are we to do evil, by letting alone and omitting the good we could do?" They were dumb. Matthew tells that He put it very close to them, by asking them, if they would not do more work for a sheep which had tumbled into a hole on the Sabbath? And "wasn't a man," He asked, "better than a sheep?" (Matt. xii. 11, 12). He looked round and round upon them, as for an answer, but they were silent with rage and confusion.

3. *The cure* (vv. 10, 11). Then He said to the man, "Stretch forth thine hand." He did so, and

behold ! his hand was as strong and well as the other. So they were entirely outwitted. He did no doctor's work after all. He didn't even *touch* the arm, or strike His own hand over the place. He silently accomplished the cure by His own expressed will. And when the man at His bidding stretched out the hand, it was to give proof positive to every beholder that the thing was done.

Observe the exquisite illustration we have here of the character of faith. The first bidding, "Stand forth," tested the courage of the man's faith. It rose above human fear. The second tested its deeper quality, of entirely trusting Jesus. He implicitly obeyed, in the very thing he naturally couldn't do, and was healed in the act of obeying.

IX. The Centurion of Great Faith (Matt. viii. 5-13 ; Luke vii. 1-10).

This is another of the mighty works that were done in Capernaum. It probably occurred on Jesus' return to Capernaum from the tour in the course of which the Sermon on the Mount was spoken.

The character of the centurion comes out (*a*) in his natural affection and care for his servant, a slave, yet specially valuable and dear to him as a son. (*b*) In his reverence for such religious light as he had already attained, and by his readiness to promote it in the most liberal way. (*c*) In his modesty and reticence, reckoning himself unworthy—as a Gentile—either to go personally to Jesus, or have Jesus come to him, using therefore, the intercession of the Jews—the chosen people. Matthew's account reports the centurion as going in person to Jesus.

and relates the whole conversation as taking place between the Lord and him. Luke's more circumstantial account tells that from the first he employed his Jewish friends to convey the request. The more abbreviated narrative relates what passed through others as if it had been directly transacted.

The case is described in the two narratives as—one of paralysis accompanied by grievous pain (Matt.); and the sufferer was considered “ready to die” (Luke). Our Lord's healing of this disease is described in a single phrase (Matt. viii. 13; Luke vii. 10). It was one of those instantaneous cures wrought at a distance from the patient, which were rather the exception among His healings. The exception was determined by the circumstances and faith of the petitioner. Compare this one with those of the courtier's son and the Syrophenician's daughter.

The points in this occurrence which made the main impression on those who witnessed it come out when we observe where the two accounts (in Matt. and Luke) exactly coincide. These are—the expression of confidence which the centurion placed in Jesus; the Lord's expression of wonder at such faith; and the gracious answer given in the cure of the boy there and then.

Wherein then consisted the *greatness* of the faith here so signally praised :—

1. It was great *when we consider the man in whom it was found*. The centurion resolved to put the case of his servant into Jesus' hands, on merely hearing the report of His healings. As a Gentile he could make no claim in his own right to the mercy of Jesus : in the way of his faith there was a barrier not present

to others. This faith was in itself so great that the Lord had not found the like, so implicit, so honouring to God's grace, not among the town's folk of Capernaum, nor the Jews of Jerusalem, nor the disciples themselves. This Roman soldier was the morning star of western faith.

2. This faith was great *in its view of Christ's Power*. Simply and boldly the imperial idea is applied by this honest believer to the region of the Kingdom. The union of all governmental power in the will of king or emperor represents the subjection of all things to this gracious One, in whom is mirrored the love and grace of Highest God. And though this be not all the truth, it goes to the heart of the truth about the power of Christ. It puts the crown of the universe on His head and the sceptre of universal dominion into His hand. Such whole-hearted honour put upon the Lord is the least tribute faith in Him ought to bring. To suppose that He can help in an easy case, but not a hard one ; near at hand, but not at a distance ; to look for stinted answers and niggard blessings, few fruits and rare conversions—is not this what starves our spiritual life, and dishonours Christ, and impoverishes His kingdom ?

3. It was great *in its sole dependence upon Christ and His will*. The faith of most of those who came to Jesus for cures, though real enough, needed the personal contact—the external means. This man's faith was above all these restrictions ; it made nothing of difficulty or distance. In this it was unparalleled in Jesus' experience, and He not only crowned this remarkable faith with its appropriate

mother, half afraid to believe that he was really living. This was, so far as we can judge, the first instance in which our Lord had raised the dead. It would have been very natural in the young man, so marvellously restored, to have left his home and accompanied Jesus. But we read that our Lord sent him back to his own natural sphere of life—“*He delivered him to his mother.*”

Ver. 16. “*And there came a fear on all.*” It was no wonder. A corpse carried out on his bier this moment, and the next a living son restored to a joyous mother. And all this not done in a corner but at the gate of a city, in the presence of a great crowd, in a manner the most absolutely God-like—no preparation, no previous knowledge, no pomp of words, no labour of prayers, but a simple command. The first feeling of terror gave place to the still deeper and holier feeling of awe and reverence for Him who by a word had called the dead to life. “*And they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and That God hath visited His people.*” This was the crowning miracle of the period of our Lord’s first Galilean ministry. It was one of those rare moments in the life of the Son of Man when the confession of Pentecost seemed on the point of being forestalled. But it could not be till He should suffer and be glorified.

There is more to be gained from this miracle than merely to prove that Jesus has “God with Him.” Works like this, taken along with His words and teaching and claims, go far to prove that He is Himself God. It is not so much the fact of His raising the dead as the manner of it which suggests His

Divinity. Sometimes a like miracle had been done by Divinely commissioned prophets, but the difference is very striking. Here all is done in His own name, and in a manner, too, so direct and majestic. The contrast between this and any such miracle by prophet or apostle is obvious, and the inference points to nothing short of absolute Godhead.

XI. The Stilling of the Tempest (Matt. viii. 18-27 ; Mark iv. 35-41 ; Luke viii. 22-5).

It was a time of our Lord's ministry when the people crowded round Him whenever they could get at Him. On this occasion they thronged Him on the lake-shore and He, retiring into the disciples' boat, spoke from it to the people gathered on the beach. It was at the close of the sermon so preached that He sought the retirement and rest of this voyage to the opposite coast. The disciples took Him with them, "even as He was in the boat," glad to get Him away from His incessant labours. Tired out with these, He lay down in the stern and fell fast asleep on the cushion. A sudden squall arose—"They were filled with water and were in jeopardy." But Jesus slept calmly on. Why did He sleep? Just because He was weary. He slept because His human life was real, and not merely played or acted.

But in such a storm, why should He sleep? Because He had perfect trust in His heavenly Father's arm. To human eyes the danger was very real. These fishermen, who had known that water all their days, were afraid for themselves and Him. Natural that they should dread the idea of all their

hopes and prospects being lost in this premature grave, yet foolish that they should fear for themselves and Him so meaningless an end.

They had abstained for a while from disturbing Jesus, but now they could do so no longer. They crowded round and awoke Him. "*Lord, save us, we perish! Master, carest Thou not that we perish!*" He wakes at the first cry of the disciples. The Son of Man had been sleeping. The Son of God awakes and speaks. "*He rebuked the wind and said unto the sea, Peace! be still!*" The "*wind ceased,*" and "*there was a great calm.*" What a revelation of God in man! It is not so much the mere power that impresses, but "it is the manner of the man."

The word *rebuke* in this description is a very suggestive one. Are we to conclude that all physical evils, alike in nature and in man, are among those works of the devil which the Christ was manifested to destroy? It may be a more accurate position if we say that storms and earthquakes, pestilences and famines, calamities and disasters, as overtaking *man* from the side of nature, are part of that confusion and disorder which sin has brought into God's creation. And in this light His word of rebuke has a great and blessed meaning. It shows that the Maker is now come to be the Healer of the world.

But He had His own disciples to rebuke as well as the storm to still. The reproof to the disciples is very instructive. "*Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?*" This probably before stilling the storm. Then after it, "*Where is your faith? How*

is it that ye have no faith?" These questions do not imply that they were absolutely faithless. Their instinctive application to Him, the words with which they awoke Him, "*Master, save us!*"—these show their belief that He could and would deliver Himself and them. But they ought to have believed that sleeping or waking made no difference to Him. It was not that they had no faith, but they failed to apply their faith fully. Fear, for the moment, ruled, and not faith.

This lesson—Fear paralysing Faith; Jesus rebuking Unbelief and putting Fear to flight; Faith the conquering opposite of Fear—these things come home to all Christians. These disciples had entrusted to their Master their souls, their lives, their all; and yet they forgot all this in a moment of mere natural, human panic. How exactly like us and our unbelief! For unbelief is always the same confused, feeble, sinful thing. You have received Christ for your Saviour; and yet let any sudden squall arise, and you fear and cry out as if all were lost. Where is your faith? Is there anything in your lot or life He cannot master.

The effect of this miracle on the minds of the beholders was great. This mighty work seemed to throw the others into the shade. This simple mastery of nature on the part of man stirred at least an awed curiosity, if it did not suggest a marvellous explanation.

The distinctive teaching of the miracle may be summed up in two items. (1) Directly, it teaches that to Him, as Lord of providence, belongs all power to defend His cause and people from danger,

and that He is continually exercising that power. (2) Less directly, it suggests the perpetual presence of Christ in and with His Church, for its protection and deliverance. The renewing power of Christianity means to the Christian the perpetual indwelling of the Christ. How often has the Christian religion seemed on the point of being extinguished! But as oft has the hidden Christ within arisen, the victorious power of resistance been imparted, and the danger has passed away.

XII. The Gadarene Demoniac (Matt. viii. 28-34; Mark v. 1-20; Luke viii. 26-39).

The mission to Gadara had but one incident, though a very striking one. The Lord crossed the lake to do this one work and then return.

No sooner almost had they stepped out upon the shore than their journey was interrupted by the attack of a fierce demoniac. The first gospel speaks of two, but the pre-eminence of one has left its mark on the memory of the eye-witnesses, and the other two accounts speak of him alone. His special abode was "among the tombs"—those caves, namely, which served for vaults of sepulture and dens of unclean things. The attempt to bind him had often been made, but he had burst the chains and broken the fetters and fled. Night and day he roamed around this mountain burial-place "crying and cutting himself with stones." The man was a maniac of the worst type. Convulsive strength, nakedness, and self-mutilation are all well-known symptoms. But his mania was the physical and psychical ground of a more terrible visitation. He

had probably brought the disease upon himself by his wickedness, but now there was added to his madness the demoniac element in its extremest form.

1. *The Miracle itself.*—At a great distance the demoniac had perceived the party, and he came bounding, as his wont was, to the attack. But on the first look of Jesus his fierceness is changed into awe, and instead of springing upon the company he bows himself and worships. Jesus says to the unclean spirit, "Come out of the man." At this word there bursts forth a fearful shriek from the unhappy victim. "*What have I to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of the Most High God? I adjure Thee by God that Thou torment me not.*"

After a short conversation into which Jesus draws him, there follows the request of the man or of the demons that Jesus would suffer them to enter into a herd of swine feeding on the mountain. Permission having been given, or taken, the Lord's command to leave the human victim was obeyed. The swine dashed down the steep and were drowned in the lake. When the dwellers round assembled to see this thing, they found the man who had been the scourge of the whole country sitting, clothed and in his right mind, at the feet of Jesus.

2. *The Episode of the Swine.*—The facts of the case must be steadily borne in mind. First, the confusion of consciousness on the part of the subject colours the narrative. The man worships, the demons deprecate; the man runs to Jesus, the demons entreat Him to let them alone. Then, the only word spoken by Jesus in this episodic part of

the transaction, is the one majestic "Depart" recorded in Matthew—the word of expulsion. That it is also regarded by the evangelists as a word of permission for what follows is clear. But all else is conjecture of commentators.

3. *The Conduct of the Gadarenes.*—This is to be ascribed to ignorance and fear rather than to avarice. The natural mind when unenlightened dreads the approach of the Divine or Supernatural, as expecting evil from that source rather than good. The same principle accounts for the way in which many still dread Christ and His grace. They stand in awe of anything very real and powerful in religion; it bewilders and frightens them. On the other hand, they do understand their own temporal interest. They perceive that spiritual enthusiasm is likely to interfere with it and bring about loss. Thus they have no other conclusion than to try to get quietly rid of it.

4. *The Gadarene Missionary.*—As the Lord was entering the ship to return, the saved man interposed, and besought that he might go with his Deliverer out of that evil place. Jesus had better use for him; he is sent first to his own house and friends. So let all grace from Christ begin to tell at home. "*Show how great things God hath done unto thee.*" This is the true method of the household missionary.

Thus the most terrible sufferer from infernal power in all the record of the gospels becomes a preacher of salvation to Ten Cities. Jesus went these few hours to Gadara: He found a demoniac and left a missionary.

XIII. The Raising of Jairus' Daughter (Matt. ix. 18-19, 23-6; Mark v. 22-4, 35-43; Luke viii. 41-2, 49-56).

Jesus and the twelve have just returned from the Gadarene visit; they are still on the margin of the lake, when a petitioner falls on his face before the Lord. It is Jairus, one of the rulers in the Synagogue of Capernaum. He came with intense earnestness, "*fell at Jesus' feet and besought Him greatly*"; his little daughter was lying at the point of death. Jairus had doubtless seen much of Jesus, and had good reason to be convinced of His power; He expresses unhesitating faith, so far as the words of his prayer go, yet we never read before this that he was a disciple.

Mark v. 24. Jesus at once went with him; so did the disciples and all the people, forming a vast and crowded procession. The interruption on the way, the healing of the woman, the conversation with her, occupied some time.

Vv. 35-6. When the father left his house to go for Jesus the child was just dying, and now this message comes. Jesus overheard and took the word out of the messenger's mouth. He checks fear ere it begins to rise: "*Be not afraid, only believe*"—language which all the more precludes the idea of a mere apparent death.

At this point the Lord separates Himself from the crowd and takes only three out of the twelve Apostles. As they approached the house the noise and tumult of Oriental wailing became apparent. As Jesus and His company entered the house, He said, "*Why make ye this ado and weep? the damsel*

the transaction, is the one majestic "Depart" recorded in Matthew—the word of expulsion. That it is also regarded by the evangelists as a word of permission for what follows is clear. But all else is conjecture of commentators.

3. *The Conduct of the Gadarenes.*—This is to be ascribed to ignorance and fear rather than to avarice. The natural mind when unenlightened dreads the approach of the Divine or Supernatural, as expecting evil from that source rather than good. The same principle accounts for the way in which many still dread Christ and His grace. They stand in awe of anything very real and powerful in religion; it bewilders and frightens them. On the other hand, they do understand their own temporal interest. They perceive that spiritual enthusiasm is likely to interfere with it and bring about loss. Thus they have no other conclusion than to try to get quietly rid of it.

4. *The Gadarene Missionary.*—As the Lord was entering the ship to return, the saved man interposed, and besought that he might go with his Deliverer out of that evil place. Jesus had better use for him; he is sent first to his own house and friends. So let all grace from Christ begin to tell at home. "*Show how great things God hath done unto thee.*" This is the true method of the household missionary.

Thus the most terrible sufferer from infernal power in all the record of the gospels becomes a preacher of salvation to Ten Cities. Jesus went these few hours to Gadara: He found a demoniac and left a missionary.

XIII. The Raising of Jairus' Daughter (Matt. ix. 18-19, 23-6 ; Mark v. 22-4, 35-43 ; Luke viii. 41-2, 49-56).

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is not dead, but sleepeth." This expression did not mean that the death was unreal ; He used the same afterward of Lazarus. We have ample proof of the reality of the death of the child in the present case ; but, dead as she appeared to human sense, to Him she only slept.

When He had put out all the mourners, the scene within the house is simply and beautifully described (ver. 40). The house is now quiet and still. They are in the presence of the dead—the parents believing, hoping against hope — the three witnesses chosen, no doubt, because of their preparedness of spirit. There, in an atmosphere of faith, not in presence of curious onlookers, Jesus does this mighty work. He takes the corpse by the hand, saying, "*Maid, arise !*" The damsel looked up, arose, walked, for she was twelve years old. It was no recovery from swoon or apparent death ; it was the case of a dead person come to life again. "*And Jesus commanded to give her meat.*" How thoughtful and mindful of every detail, as if He had been a kind, careful physician !

Vv. 42-3. The reasons why this work was done in such privacy are tolerably plain. Why the townspeople and neighbours are excluded we may judge to be because they had seen enough of His mighty works. Not even the twelve were permitted to see it, only the favoured three. He did not admit a single relative or inmate of the house, except the parents, and He charged them that no man should know it. There is no prodigality about His miracles. Plentiful when the relief of human misery and the entrance of spiritual light were His objects, they

were never wrought merely to compel belief or overawe mankind.

This story suggests analogies of the way in which the Saviour quickens the spiritually dead.

1. Those whom He calls early are called easily. The ease, the quietness, with which Jesus raised the little maid, irresistibly suggests the easy recall of a spirit not far gone on its journey to the unseen world. In the young man's case He laid His hand on the bier; in Lazarus' case He cried with a loud voice. One cannot help drawing out the spiritual analogue. The young are not hardened by long-standing worldliness and indifference. So when the Lord calls them it is quietly and gently. But let us learn from the words and acts of Jesus here how it should be followed up. Young converts lack knowledge; they cannot have experience. Therefore they must needs be spiritually led and sustained—"He commanded that something should be given her to eat."

2. Such early impression is truly Divine work. No power could raise the dead but that of Jesus, for it was Divine. So with every conversion; it is a Divine act. He makes the very thing He bids. And it is all done in quietness, that spiritual resurrection. At least, it is not done amid the laughter of the scornful, nor before the curious multitudes.

XIV. The Woman with the Issue of Blood (Matt. ix. 20-22; Mark v. 25-34; Luke viii. 43-8).

This incident is marked out among our Lord's healings by two peculiarities; it was a miracle within a miracle, it was a cure obtained without a

word spoken beforehand. No sooner had Jesus set foot on land, on returning from Gadara, than He is called on to go on an errand of mercy and finds another merciful work to do on the road. It was further an exceptional healing in being without any previous conversation. The faith of this woman was so fearless, prompt, and resolute, that before a word had been spoken she believes, resolves, acts. But He would not let her go until He had obtained a confession of her faith and an account of her cure from her own lips. Thus the exception confirmed the rule on which He acted, that, apart from faith and the acknowledgment of it, there could be no blessing. Had the woman been suffered to go away without acknowledging the source and manner of her healing, she might have attributed the cure, on His part, to a magical virtue that flowed unconsciously from His Person ; and on her part, to physical contact rather than believing trust. But he said : " No ! it was not chance nearness to My body in the crowd that wrought the cure, it was not the touch of My garment's hem. It was the dealing of thy soul with thy Saviour, — a vital and spiritual transaction. '*Thy faith hath made thee whole ?*' " That is what the incident has to teach us, viz., that faith is a reasonable and intelligible thing. Two things in the narrative especially claim our attention ; the woman's confidence in Christ, and Christ's action towards her.

1. *The woman's faith, its strength and its weakness.* — Tradition makes her a resident at Paneas or Cæsarea Philippi, who had wandered to Galilee, seeking relief from her trouble. She had most likely never seen Jesus before, had never heard Him speak, had

never beheld one of His miracles. In these circumstances it would not have been surprising, after all she had suffered and spent, had she thought of coming to the Galilean Healer as a forlorn hope. On the contrary, she not only had hope so much as led her to think it worth while to make the journey, but she had gathered a strong persuasion of His ability, so that she said, "*If I may but touch his clothes I shall be whole.*" The persuasion was thoroughly reasonable, because justified by facts. It was when she had "*heard the things concerning Jesus*" that she came to Him. She never seems to have doubted for a moment her right to take the cure if she could get it.

No doubt there were defects in this faith. Its promptness may have owed something to the mechanical or material conception of the Healer's power, as if it were some atmosphere that surrounded Him, or some magical influence that flowed even from His garments. But the confidence she had in Jesus was typical in that it was strong and well founded, and it was as immediate in success as it was prompt in action.

As that day in the streets of Capernaum many pressed Him, but one touched Him, so it is still. This woman was convinced of her disease and its danger; but so many nominal followers of Christ try to persuade themselves that their disease is not fatal. She went straight to Jesus as soon as she heard that He was near; but so many of us are waiting for the "convenient season." She took the most inconvenient season, but it was given her of God, and she was saved. Those who in their search

for spiritual health follow her example, will be as successful and blessed as she was.

2. *The Saviour's action, its wisdom and tenderness.*—The Lord was not unconscious of the virtue He put forth, nor of the faith which received it. But to bring that faith into clearness and purity it was necessary to bring the subject into conscious and open relation to her Healer. She came at His word, "*fearing and trembling*," but, encouraged by His look and by the consciousness that she was healed, she made her confession "*before all the people*." Then He clears her faith to her own mind, confirms her cure as a permanent one, and claims to be Himself the knowing and willing Author of it all. Had the woman been allowed to slip away unnoticed, she would have lost the honour of confessing her faith and of having the cure confirmed. Reserve was her fault—a wish to hide the cure; thus cheating herself of comfort and withholding from the Lord His due honour.

There are Christians whose fault is reserve; they would be saved, as it were, by stealth. The Saviour will not have it so. We cannot claim Christ for ours, but He will also declare His part, and have us acknowledge that we are His. "To confess with the mouth" (Rom. x. 9), is not only an essential part of salvation, it is the consummation of it.

XV. Two Blind Men and a Dumb Demon

(Matt. ix. 27-38).

This passage is peculiar to St Matthew, and it contains two of what may be called the minor miraculous incidents. They appear to have oc-

curred on Jesus leaving the house of Jairus to return to the house of His disciples.

v. 27. This is the earliest in the notable group of such cases in the Gospels. From causes connected with the climate, the soil, and the customs of the people, severe forms of ophthalmic inflammation are far more common in Eastern countries than with us. This class of miracles also carried with it evidence peculiarly conclusive to the mind of the Jew, no doubt because it had been prominently asserted in the prophets as one of the marks of Messiah, that by Him "the eyes of the blind should see out of obscurity and out of darkness" (Isa. xxix. 18).

v. 28. The faith of those men proved its strength by its importunity. They followed Him into the house, determined at least to take no silent denial. Jesus' early cures had been wrought almost without solicitation, but now He requires a fuller expression of faith. "*Believe ye that I am able to do this?*" This element of faith—belief in Christ's power, and its sufficiency for our particular need—is fundamental: it is the proof of the living nature of our faith. That "Christ is able" is one of those familiar verities whose greatness hides them from our view.

v. 29. They had proved their faith and confessed it, and Jesus immediately and generously honours it. He touched their eyes—conveying through another sense His personal action in the cure. Then He proclaims Faith's charter; whatsoever you need, only believe Him able and willing, and it is yours.

Vv. 30, 31. This is an instance of the diversity of

treatment in the proclamation of miracles. Jesus enjoins silence in this case and in that of Jairus' daughter, but in the case of the woman who touched Him it is otherwise. She who touched in secret was made to confess openly. These two men, who cried after Him in the street, were blessed privately in the house and sent quietly away. Notoriety of miraculous working among those who had already seen so much of it, would only have fostered the false view of His Christhood which was rising. His design was to prevent the people from being misled by the mere report of the miracles. Yet the deeds themselves were not meant to be hid, for the record of them has been preserved even in such cases as those before us, which might have been counted of less moment.

Vv. 32, 33. No sooner have the men whose sight has been restored gone out than another case is brought in. This was one "possessed," and in consequence both deaf and dumb, as the one word used signifies. Apparently the demonic element is here the ruling one; there was no organic defect. Our Lord dealt with the cause, struck at the root, by casting out the demon. So He treats our spiritual diseases. Dealing with symptoms only will never please any good doctor, nor does it satisfy our Great Physician. A clean heart is what He promises first; then all thoughts, words, and actions will be clean. This miracle produced a great impression. The Jewish rabbis and teachers professed to cast out evil spirits, but a deaf and dumb "possessed" was beyond their reach—he was beyond the scope of any influences they could bring

to bear. Here, then, was an instance of Jesus' power specially fitted to impress the people and to exasperate His enemies. "The multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel."

XVI. Feeding Five Thousand (Matt. xiv. 13-21; Mark vi. 30-44; Luke ix. 10-17; John vi. 1-14).

This miracle is remarkable from the fact of its being the only one recorded by all the four evangelists. It happened when Jesus, seeking retirement, went with the Twelve across the Sea of Galilee towards the north-east. But He did not find quiet there. The people found out whither He was bound, and went on foot round the north end of the lake, so that when Jesus arrived at the shore He found a large congregation waiting. After having spoken and healed diseases until evening, a practical difficulty presented itself to the Saviour's mind (John vi. 5.). In the hurry of their unpremeditated chase, the people had brought little or no provision: the towns and villages were distant, and how was food to be obtained? The disciples declared it impossible to provide food for such a multitude; they had only a trifle left of their own store. Then, when He had aroused their attention and made them take exact note of what the provision on hand amounted to: "*Five loaves*" or "*cakes*" and "*two small fishes*," the Master said—"Bring them hither to Me." Next He took the supply and placed it before Him. "Now," He proceeded, "*let the people sit down to meat.*" Then, when they were seated, He took the handful, held it up before God, blessed, brake, and gave it to His disciples. Each Apostle, as he went

to the head of a company and gave away an armful, found that he had as much remaining for the next ; and each of the eaters, as he took for himself of the handful handed him by his neighbour, found that he had as much left to hand to the next. Thus the happy, wondrous meal went on, and at the end the remainder filled twelve baskets. The immediate effect of this wonder was very great. The people followed Jesus in greater crowds than before—they would have proclaimed Him King at Jerusalem. But to make Him King in Jerusalem was one thing ; to throne Him in their hearts and lives quite another.

Let us turn to some of the teaching aspects of this miracle. It presents, like several of the nature-miracles, the Lordship over nature and providence which belongs to Jesus as Head of the spiritual kingdom ; Christ's followers, when engaged in the work of the kingdom, need have no anxiety about the supply of their bodily wants. A less obvious inference is its symbolic bearing on the spiritual provision of the kingdom and the mode of its distribution to mankind. The "feeding of the multitude" was meant to show how the Living Word, Christ, in the Gospel, becomes the Bread of Life to a perishing world. Each of the significant points in the action has its lesson.

I. "*Give ye them to eat.*"—Jesus first made it quite clear that natural means for providing food for the multitude had failed, and this prepared for the reception of the supernatural. But the acceptance of the loaves at the hands of men has another meaning. The Lord could have made bread out of any-

thing or nothing, but in His work, miraculous though it was, the servants had their part. It was very little, but it was their best, and the Master gave it the blessing. The success of Christ's Gospel does not really depend on any efforts or sacrifices of ours, but surely it deserves our best. And in another sense it does need us. The Lord's way is to reach men's hearts by man's ministry, and He bids us do for Him more than, humanly speaking, we can, to show how easy it is for Him when trusted to do it through us.

2. "*Bring them hither to Me.*"—The *blessing of Jesus* converted the handful into a plenteous feast. The servant does his best if he is earnest ; and then, if he is wise, he counts it less than nothing without the Master's blessing. The most elaborate human effort as such, is powerless in Divine things. Let us get our spiritual provision passed under the Master's blessing hand, for He blesses all the real bread that is brought to Him. He honours human effort at His gracious will—the Word itself He is bound to bless by His unfailing promise. He honours His own provision, and keeps His promise. "It shall not return unto Him void."

3. *The Distribution of the Food.*—The miracle was wrought through the blessing, but realised in the breaking and parting of the bread. No mountains of bread were seen growing up under the Saviour's hands. No one saw a prodigy, but all felt and enjoyed a miracle as they parted and used this bread. So with the Gospel. It is in the distribution, the sharing and spreading of the word of life, that the benefit is realised. It is possible to talk as

if the Scriptures were God ; as if some mesmeric power came out of preaching. And there is power in both, but it is in the theme, and is only realised in the practical and diffusive use of it. One of the best features of Christian work in our day is that so much is done by those outside the "army of ordained preachers." Thus the Living Bread is passed on by the eaters themselves, not only by those who minister to them. It is for the Church of Christ to recognise such work, and to bring it into harmony with her own God-commissioned functions.

XVII. Walking on the Water (Matt. xiv. 22-36 ; Mark vi. 45-52 ; John vi. 15-21).

1. *Jesus alone*.—The Lord's first act after the miracle of feeding the five thousand was to cause the disciples to set out in their boat for the western shore of the lake. When they were gone He dismissed the people, and then "*He went up into a mountain apart to pray.*" We have here "Jesus as our example in prayer"; an example of *solitary* prayer, of *continued* prayer, of *special* prayer. John expressly records that Jesus departed that evening alone, because He perceived that the people would take Him by force to make Him a king. He "perceived" how He could have founded a great party among the Jews. But the decision made in that night's prayer appeared next day. He went to the synagogue of Capernaum and preached such a sermon that almost all but the Twelve left him.

2. *The Disciples alone*.—The Twelve, though in ignorance as to whether their Master was to cross that night, or how He was to do it, endeavoured to

make for the other shore, as He had bid them. But the wind was against them, and they made very slow progress with the oars. Jesus saw them from the mountain side (Mark vi. 48) battling against the storm, and at the right moment He comes to help them. In this way He was training their faith to hold fast His presence when He should be on earth with them no more. Let us remember when we are in the midst of storm and danger that He sees us, that the winds and waves are under His control and that He will come to our help in His own time and way.

3. *Jesus comes to them walking on the water.*—The night was far spent. The storm was great; it was necessary that He should go to them. He came after them by a mode of progression unknown to men,—“*walking on the sea.*” This is a direct act of control over natural law, bringing with it a suggestion of Divine power, but also of a time when His should be a spiritual and glorified human body. Note that it was only for the sake of others that He thus assumed His glory, so to say, before the time. He would not turn a single stone into bread to serve His own hunger, but He multiplied the barley loaves to feed the multitude. He would not hurl himself from the Temple-pinnacle for self-glory; but He flung himself on the waves to reassure the disciples. When He came He seemed about to pass them by, that they might entreat Him. He delays or seems to delay His help: He seems to pass us by; but all that we may desire Him and cry to Him.

Mark vi. 49-50. How they saw Him is not said. Anyhow, they all broke out in one spontaneous cry of terror as they saw the passing figure; yet had

faith been at hand it should not have been so. Faithlessness breeds fear. A child of God should fear no appearance of his Father, however singular. Ver. 50. With His voice, He reassured them. If He had not spoken, His appearance on the water would only have terrified them. When the perception of our Lord Himself goes with His acts, then amid them all, we can have joy and peace.*

XVIII. The Syrophenician's Daughter (Matt. xv. 21-28; Mark vii. 24-30).

The first thing to note here is the change, at this point, in the scene and circumstances of our Lord's miracles. The "year of success" was ended; the "year of opposition" was now begun. His labours consist henceforth of a succession of tours or journeys. We may suppose that one reason for this journey was that Jesus might sketch in outline the missionary plan which He left His apostles to fill up, and we are told that another object of it was retirement. The passover companies had gone up to Jerusalem, and He departs with His disciples into the half-heathen country north of Palestine proper. Even there, however, His fame had preceded Him.

In regard to the principal subject of this story, the mother of the possessed child, let us note: (1) *Her person*. She was a Gentile of the Gentiles, a descendant of the original inhabitants of Canaan. She

* The incident of Peter walking on the water to go to Jesus, recorded in the first Gospel only, can scarcely, in face of the other two narratives which leave it out, be considered an essential part of this miracle. But it can be treated by itself as an incident full of spiritual suggestion. Readers are referred for a treatment of it at the corresponding place in the larger work, named in the Prefatory Note.

is also called a "Greek," implying that she was by religion a pagan, and she is perhaps the only example of a heathen being blessed by our Lord Himself in the flesh ; for the centurion of Capernaum was obviously already a convert to the Jewish faith.

(2) *Her case.* It was her little daughter's case, yet she makes it her own—"Have mercy on me. My daughter is grievously vexed with a demon." There were degrees of that misery, and this was of the worst sort. The theory which attributes "possession" always to moral causes in the subjects of it, will not cover this instance nor that of the boy brought to the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration. Some terrible physical or hereditary malady was the seat or organ of the demoniac power.

(3) *Her address.* It was very earnest (Mark vii. 25, 26). But Matthew (xv. 22) records the pivot-word—"O Lord, thou Son of David." This shows that she was to appeal to Him as Israel's Messiah. There was probably in her mind no idea of any claim on her part except her need, only some desperate hope that the spiritual King of the Jews would bestow this boon in passing. But Jesus leads her on to the higher ground from whence he could consistently grant her request.

(4) *Her reception.* "*He answered her not a word.*" This is certainly very unusual. His patients and suppliants are usually healed at the first word, or led up to the cure by some statement or question. But here is absolute silence. Then we have the intercession of the twelve (Matt. xv. 23) ; they would have her answered to be rid of her, but He delays the answer with a divine "much more" of mercy and abounding grace in which He

means to bless her. (5) *His reply to the twelve* (v. 24). This was the real reason. He has no commission to do miracles among the heathen, and though He afterwards treats this woman's case as an exception, it is an exception which confirms the principle. When Jesus Christ is risen and ascended, then shall He be preached to all nations, races, and classes of men. But so long as He is Himself the preacher, it is to the Jew only He is sent. Perhaps the woman drew encouragement from the quiet reasonableness of His answer. She fell down at His feet; she came and worshipped Him, saying: "*Lord, help me!*" Up to this moment Jesus had spoken only to the disciples, now He speaks to her (v. 26). The words are not a mere apparent refusal. Taken along with the sentence spoken to the disciples about His own commission, they mean: "You are not of Israel, and to them am I sent. It is children's bread I have to give, and you are outside the family circle." But He softens His answer; He uses a word denoting, not the large wild dogs which prowled about eastern cities, but those which the Romans had introduced—animals treated as domestic favourites. Further, He suggests that though the table was not yet ready, soon the whole Gentile world would have access to it—"Let the children first be filled" (Mark vii. 27). She takes not the least exception to His words; but draws with perfect logic the sweetest meaning out of their seeming bitterness (Matt. xv. 27). Doubtless He gave her the occasion—meaningly and lovingly. But how clear her insight into the heart of Jesus! How humble and how bold her faith! She took the word that sounded like a refusal and a reproach,

and turned it into an implicit assent. Jesus rejoiced to be thus overcome (v. 28). She believed that nearness or distance made no difference to His power to heal, and so went home in perfect confidence. Her faith was great : (a) in overcoming obstacles—silence, exclusion, and apparent reproach ; (b) in its implicit trust in Christ's word for the cure of her absent child ; (c) in spiritual tact. Taking the lowest room, her faith won the highest praise, and forestalled the day of a universal gospel.

XIX. The Deaf Man of Decapolis (Mark vii. 31-end).

This incident befel on our Lord's return journey from the scene of the preceding story. During His passage through Decapolis, multitudes came bringing their sick to be healed. The special case selected by St Mark out of this group of healings is that of a deaf man, unable to utter articulate and intelligible sounds. When Jesus proceeds to the cure the ears are first opened, then the tongue is loosed. The order is that of Nature : it is the receiving of articulate sounds by the ear and their action on brain and mind which awakens and educates the functions of speech. It is only when we consider this relation between sound and speech in the mechanism of the senses and the brain that we can appreciate the truly stupendous nature of the miracle. The entire process of establishing communication between the centres of hearing and speech was abridged into a moment.

The Cure and its Method. Christ's methods are ever fresh and full of adaptations, and He used some new actions specially suited to this case. (I

Ver. 33. *a.*) Probably a desire to secure privacy and prevent popular excitement was one reason for this action ; perhaps, also, it was meant to obviate any profane imitation of His curative acts. (2 Ver. 33. *b.*) The need for these unusual actions in this instance is tolerably plain. They were not so much means by which He conveyed the blessing, as signs intended to explain to the man's mind how the blessing came. Nothing can be more helpful to Christian workers confronted by some "hard case" than the thought that Christ can unlock the door of every human spirit.

The manner of the Healer is also peculiar (ver. 34). The upward look may have been a sign to the man whence His power to heal came, but doubtless it is connected with the sigh which accompanied it. We are told that He was a man of sorrows and of loneliness. This scene sets before us the solitary Saviour in presence of the sins and sufferings of a lost race.

The Word of Power (v. 35).—Mark records the Aramaic word which Jesus used ; the best reason we can find for this is just that it is one word. A glance to heaven,—a sigh,—a word,—and the miracle is done ! Here is something Divine, God-like. A divine word it is, divine as a Redemption word. "Be opened" is His watchword as a Redeemer.

The Result (vv. 36, 37).—Why should we insist that every case of spiritual healing be proclaimed to all the world, when the word of the Lord to that soul may be : "See thou tell no man" ? Why, on the other hand, should conversion be considered a thing

too sacred to be spoken of when His word to another may be: "Go and show thy friends how great things the Lord hath done for Thee"? The desire on Jesus' part to suppress any popular excitement based on mere wonder was counteracted by an honest enthusiasm on their part. If His "Be opened" reminds us of the Creator's *fiat*, their "He hath done all things well" recalls creation's praise (Gen. i. 31).

XX. Feeding Four Thousand (Matt. xv. 29-38 ;
xvi. 4-12 ; Mark viii. 1-9, 13-21).

This second feeding is recorded in two of the Synoptic Gospels, in both of which the first has also been described, which gives ground for the assumption that it is a work distinct from the feeding of the five thousand. The occasion and motive of the second miracle, also, differ from those of the first. The differences will appear as we read (1) the story of the feeding of four thousand, and (2) the after conversation in which both are recounted.

1. *The Story and its Lessons.*—Though not far removed in time or place from the former feeding, this incident occurs in a new connection, and after a distinct crisis in the Saviour's ministry. The spot, so far as we know, is a mountain solitude on the eastern side of the lake, whither Jesus and His disciples had gone for rest. Soon, however, multitudes gather there from surrounding towns and villages, bringing their diseased ones to the Healer. After three days it becomes necessary to consider how the people are to be fed, and this time it is Jesus Himself who suggests the question of relieving their hunger.

"I have compassion on the multitude." It is the best proof of His greatness and completeness as man that the highest estimate of the soul is combined with tenderest care for the body.

The conversation which ensues between Master and disciples closely resembles that on the former occasion. He bids them bring what they have—seven loaves and a few little fishes. They might have remembered how He had supplied the want before. This unbelieving forgetfulness is just like ours. We stand despairing at the foot of the next hill after our gracious Deliverer has removed mountains. How like our own folly is their question: "*From whence can a man satisfy these with bread here in the wilderness?*" Then follows the seating of the multitude, the blessing and distributing of the scanty provision, the entire satisfying of the people, and the gathering up of the fragments.

We find some subsidiary lessons in the details of the story. *a.* A lesson in *generosity*. Jesus made His disciples give all they had: no doubt some of them wondered why. But withholding from a just claim of beneficence or piety is wrong. Withholding on a plea of carefulness for the future is a double wrong in a Christian. *b.* A lesson of *thankfulness*. Jesus "gave thanks" and "blessed" the food—turning these poor materials into a royal feast. Let us learn that giving of thanks is a blessing upon our daily food. A thankful spirit will bless, and in a sense multiply our bread.

2. *The Recounting of both the Miraculous Feedings* (Matt. xvi. 4-12; Mark viii. 13-21).—A short time after the Second Feeding Jesus and the Twelve

crossed to the western shore of the lake, and after a brief stay there recrossed to the eastern side. The disciples had forgotten to take bread, and had only a single loaf in the boat, and they took His warning to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees" as an allusion to their carelessness. But He made use of their strange blunder, rebuked them, and caused them to repeat the details of the two miracles of the Loaves.

Following the suggestions of this record we find (1) That there were clearly two distinct occasions of this sort ; (2) Some have made the repetition of the miracle symbolic or prophetic—viz., that Christ showed Himself as the Bread of Life twice—to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile. But as Luke omits the Second Feeding, this is doubtful. (3) We can see that the reduplication of the miracle and the recounting of both were meant to enforce the duty of remembering the Lord's mercies. "Do ye not yet understand, neither remember?" (Matt. xvi. 9).

XXI. The Blind Man at Bethsaida (Mark viii. 22-26).

It is all but certain that the Bethsaida of this story is not the city of Andrew and Philip, but the "village" on the north-eastern shore recently raised by Herod to the dignity of a town. In details this cure closely resembles that of the deaf man in Decapolis.

Ver. 22. Probably the man belonged, not to Bethsaida, but to some neighbouring hamlet. Therefore he was conveyed some distance out of the place, that public excitement might be avoided, and charged to avoid the village on his way home.

Ver. 23. As in the case of the deaf man, Jesus did more than He had been asked to do. Possibly in both cases it was needful by these actions to quicken faith and hope—the men did not come of their own accord, but were brought by their friends. Immediately on the action mentioned in v. 23, Jesus put the question, “*Seest thou aught?*” Ver. 24. “*And he looked up.*” The first visual movement is naturally towards the source of light. Those standing round probably now begin to move and he sees them indistinctly, blurred, and magnified. His ability to describe what he sees shows that he had not been born blind.

Ver. 25. At a second application the cure was complete. And from this quiet spot the Lord dismissed him, with vision perfectly restored, to his home. The one thing in which this miracle stands quite alone is that it was not an instantaneous cure, but one divided into two distinct stages.

The brief story is full of spiritual beauties. The perfect picture of gentleness and condescension at the outset—the Lord Himself taking the hand of this poor man and guiding him to the place of healing. What a lesson on the directness of the Christian service! The isolating, too, of the blind man before his cure is characteristic of Jesus, and suggestive of some of His spiritual processes. But what can be most readily taken as a spiritual emblem in this story is the progressiveness of the cure. Blindness can be so dealt with, while in some other diseases and afflictions the cure must be done in an instant if it is to be complete. And Jesus’ cures of blindness are types of the gracious opening of

spiritual eyesight, which usually takes place by degrees. Let us note then—(1) That the first stage of this cure was *real sight*. The first step in spiritual illumination is to give the power of sight. It is not gradual regeneration which is taught here, but the gradual enlightenment of a regenerate man. (2) At this first stage, sight may be *very imperfect*. Among those who receive the grace of God this is not uncommon. Their sight is not clear nor strong; they confound many parts of Divine truth, and fall into errors of belief and conduct. More serious consequences, however, will be averted where there is consciousness of imperfect spiritual knowledge. Had the man said at this stage, "Now I see perfectly," his cure might have been arrested. Not even to our Healer must we profess more inward clearness than we have. Another characteristic of the imperfect stage of spiritual vision is the accompaniment of feelings of uneasiness and alarm. Many feel pain and perplexity about religion when first brought under spiritual impressions. "Open Thou mine eyes" is a prayer for us all, but let us understand the prayer we offer. We may be asking a sharp surgical operation, or a long process of couching for the inward eye. We do not become enlightened and holy as by some magical transformation, without process or trouble. (3) Betimes Christ gives to all His own *complete sight*. The remedy for all imperfect spiritual vision is renewed contact and closer acquaintance with Jesus. He has made express provision for the enlightenment of His believing followers. No one can be a follower of Jesus without the first incisive touch of the new

birth. He cannot "see the Kingdom" but by the Holy Ghost. Yet there is another and further office of the Spirit—to enlarge with His unction those who already have the faculty of sight. Christ begins by bringing us out of darkness. He carries us on into "marvellous light."

XXII. The Epileptic Boy (Matt. xvii. 14-21 ; Mark ix. 14-29 ; Luke ix. 37-43).

It is surely not without design that two such contrasted scenes as those of the Transfiguration and this father bringing his afflicted boy to the disciples for healing, are recorded on the same page, as they are in all three accounts of this miracle. Jesus was absent for the moment from the latter scene, but His arrival changes all. He comprehends the situation at a glance. The attention of the people is concentrated on Him (Mark ix. 15). It is tolerably plain that we are back again in Inner Galilee ; such incidents could only take place where his usual foes were present as well as those who knew Him. Jesus at once goes to the heart of matters. "*He asked the scribes, What question ye with them ?*" They fell back silenced, but while those who merely wished to argue about Christ are dumb, the man who needed Him was eager and ready. Throwing himself at Jesus' feet ; "*Master,*" he "answered"—though not previously addressed,—"*I have brought unto Thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit.*" Then he goes on to describe the disease, a case of epileptic lunacy, complicated by "possession" (v. 18 a.). He begins by expressing a measure of faith—having meant to bring his son to Jesus Himself—and ends in dis-

appointment (v. 18 *b.*). Hereupon the Lord looked round with rebuke on them all (v. 19), an expression of the sorrow of all His life, the slowness of heart and unbelief of His contemporaries, and even of His own followers. Then turning more particularly to the father, He said "*Bring him unto Me.*" When brought, the boy is seized with one of his paroxysms. With characteristic calmness Jesus turns from the sad spectacle and converses with the father, for He must get at the faith of the man, that his child might be blessed. First he enquires how long this terrible thing has had possession of the youth. The father replies "*Of a child,*" then goes off again in a description of the malady, and pauses with a pathetic but almost desponding appeal (v. 22): Jesus takes up the word, "*If Thou canst.*" "Nay," He said, "the difficulty is not there, I am both able and willing. The real question is, If thou canst believe. Think not that for this great cure thou must have a great faith. Only trust Me." "*All things are possible to him that believeth.*" The man catches a glimpse of new and higher grace; this gracious One who invites his trust can dispel his distrust, and he cries out, "*Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.*" There is no reason for longer delay now; Jesus turns to the piteous object at His feet and addresses the demon in terms of majesty and power (v. 25). The evil-minded tenant had received irresistible notice to quit, and throwing what seemed the dead body at Jesus' feet, "*he went out.*" The Healer took up the lad, and delivered him to his father.

Let us fix our attention on the central expression in the narrative, as it illustrates believing grace.

1. *Faith, like light, reveals its own source.* In the very act of responding to the Divine call—"I believe"—it is plain that the power to reach out to Christ is the gift of that Lord in whom the man believes. Believing is at once man's act and God's grace. So much man's act that the Almighty Giver waits for it. So much God's grace that the receiver prays for it, and in the act of taking God's gifts ascribes to Him alone the power to take them. Thus the faith that is in us reveals its origin. "It is the gift of God."

2. *Faith detects unbelief and finds a refuge from it.* At first the man evidently supposes that all turns on the intense form of the malady, of which he gives so graphic a description. Then he thinks it was not removed because of the lesser might of the disciples, then fears that even Jesus cannot grapple with it. At length, at the Lord's word, the scales fall from his eyes. He sees that nothing stood in the way but his own doubting, and he now cries for help to remove it. The man who complains of his own deadness of heart is at least alive. He confesses and bemoans his want of faith and repairs anew to the Author and Finisher of faith Himself.

A side-lesson of the story is *the vicarious power of faith*. The success of this father for his child is typical of a whole class of our Lord's acts of mercy. One half of the detailed healings in the gospel history were wrought at the prayer of friends. This father remains a monument of faith, timid yet true, because his love for his boy made him that. His "Have compassion on *us* and help *us*," like the heathen mother's "Have mercy on *me*," was highly honoured by Jesus.

XXIII. The Coin in the Fish's Mouth (Matt. xvii. 24-27).

This story is not strictly a miracle-narrative at all, for the miracle is not actually told. The uses intended by the narrative are (1) *doctrinal* and (2) *ethical*. The doctrine taught is the place of Jesus in the kingdom of heaven—His own place of Sonship by right of nature, and that which He wins for His followers in grace. The moral enforced is, that greatness in the kingdom is best proved by service and humility.

1. *The Doctrinal Truth*.—The question raised, in the conversation between Peter and the tax-collectors, as the A.V. puts it, is about "tribute." But really the thing in question was not the secular tax-levying which comes up in chap. xxii. 17; here it was the Temple tax due to Jehovah which was the subject of inquiry. The law described in Exod. xxx. 12-16 had fixed at half a shekel the sum to be paid by every Israelite of full age at the sacred enumeration—partly as a donation for the erection of the sanctuary, partly as ransom or atonement money. After the Captivity it became a personal poll-tax for the support of the Temple service. On the return of the Lord and His disciples to what might be called their own stated residence, Peter is met, alone, by the collectors of the Temple money with the question whether or not the Master was in the habit of paying this tribute. They thought it not improbable that, like some other persons of religious standing, Jesus would hold Himself exempt. Peter answers without hesitation that his Master would pay the tax, but as soon as he rejoins Him,

Jesus discovers His knowledge of what had passed, and puts it to him, in parabolic fashion, whether upon reflection he finds that he has answered rightly.

The thing in question is tribute of the kingdom of heaven. Now, do kings exact taxes of the children of the palace, or of their subjects in general? The answer is plain—The sons of royalty are untaxed. Had Peter forgotten his own confession, forgotten that Jesus was Lord of the Temple—a Son in His Father's house? Even if Jesus had before this paid the tribute, the time was come to impress on the minds of the disciples that His Divine claim exempted Him by right from such an exaction.

2. *The Moral Lesson.*—A comparison of the Synoptic narratives shows that during this homeward journey to Capernaum occurred the dispute among the disciples about priority in the kingdom, which drew from the Lord several touching and instructive utterances, this probably being one of them. When viewed in this connection the present story becomes luminous, and Jesus' words about the Temple tax are seen to have their moral design. To teach "the foremost disciple" a lesson of humility and self-effacement, Jesus directs his attention to His own claim, His willingness to waive it, and His reason for so doing—viz., lest offence should follow a premature assertion of even a Divine right. The key to the moral intention lies in the words, "But lest we cause them to stumble" (R.V.). It was a lesson of meekness and wisdom.

After these two things have been thus taught in words, Jesus instructs Peter how both shall be coun-

tersigned and confirmed by deed (v. 27). The combination of humility and majesty, simplicity and dignity in the whole transaction is striking. The real interests of His kingdom must never suffer for want of internal supply while He who is its Head is King and Lord of all. Therefore a singular mode of supplying the want is employed, stamping with the signet of miracle the incident and all its lessons. These lessons are : (1) To declare the Messiahship of Jesus as Son of God and Head of the kingdom of heaven. (2) To show that the Kingdom has for internal support a treasury as inexhaustible as that universe which is at the disposal of its Lord. (3) To set forth the forbearance with which even Divine claims are to be presented to men, especially when these affect the consciences of others.

XXIV. The Man Born Blind (John ix.).

With this chapter before us, it can no more be said that the difficulties of the modern mind are wholly disregarded in the Gospels. Here is that argumentative handling of the various difficulties about a miracle with which we are so familiar. The occurrence is related. Then arise questions on it : Was anything unusual done? How was it done? Who was the doer of it? Was the doing of it a mark of Divine commission and authority? Who and what shall we conclude the doer of it to be? These questions are asked and answered here, in presence of the facts themselves.

1. *The Introduction of the Case* (vv. 1-5).—The restoration to sight of a man born blind was the illustration of the great utterance in the preceding

chapter, repeated here (v. 5): "I am the Light of the world" (viii. 12). The light of Divine salvation in the face of Jesus Christ overcomes the darkness of man's evil, moral and physical, and the story is introduced by a discussion of the evil—the connection of its moral and physical aspects (v. 2). Physical evil the result of sin was the problem in the mind of the disciples as they looked at this man, but they took it by the wrong handle. The Lord in His answer does not disturb the principle connecting sin and suffering; He only exposes the false notion of its retributive distribution. Suffering follows sin; but here and now the distribution of suffering is not according to the persons or proportions of the sinning. That question runs into another world than this. In face of the evil present here, the only Christ-like question is how to remedy it. This man is here that "the work of God should be manifest in him." Man's present need meant for Jesus the call to immediate beneficent action.

2. *The Miracle Itself* (vv. 6-7).—Having disposed of the questions of the disciples He proceeds spontaneously to work the cure. There was no request on the man's own part, not to be wondered at in his state of total darkness and unacquaintance with the facts. First, Jesus made a plaster of moistened clay with which He covered the blind man's eyes. Then He bade him go and wash in Siloam. He obeyed; and the blessing which burst on him for the first time is expressed in one phrase of simple majesty: "*He washed, and came seeing.*" Signs to help the faith of the patient, a process to the beneficent result, were not altogether unusual in these heal-

ings. This whole work illustrates not merely in general the success of Christ in dispelling the darkness of human ills, but more specially the analogy between the cure of physical blindness and the enlightening of the mind in the knowledge of Christ.

3. *The Discussion* (vv. 8-34). — This falls into several stages or acts. First, there is friendly discussion among neighbours and acquaintances (vv. 8-12). Their surprise at first led them to doubt the identity of the man who had been so long a familiar object at his place of alms-giving. When he told them from whom and how he had received his sight, they would have gone next to the Healer; but He could not be found. Then followed the appeal to the Pharisees as their religious leaders, and here we are to note that it was a Sabbath on which all this had been done. When the man repeated the story of his cure to the Pharisees, the dilemma appeared. Either they must deny the fact of the cure, or they must admit that Jesus did no wrong in performing such a work on the Sabbath. Thus they are split up into two parties (v. 16). They attempted first to elicit some unfavourable opinion from the man himself, but unsuccessfully. His parents, when called, proved wary witnesses, out of whom very little could be got. Yet all that is obtained makes for Jesus and against the Pharisees (vv. 19-21). Then the man is recalled, and an attempt made to bring him round to the opinion of his judges. The more probable view of their line of argument is that they still persist in denying the facts, and try to coerce or cajole the subject into like denial. "Give up your

foolish story. It must be false. Tell truth, and give glory to God" (v. 24, R.V.). But his "*One thing I know*" is the rock on which all their dogmas are shattered for him.

Then they begin again to overhaul details (vv. 26-7); but when the man declines to gratify them, unless, as he ironically suggests, they really desire to follow Jesus, the judicial sham breaks down. They openly abuse and revile him as a disciple. But this unlearned beggar stood out against the whole council of the Jews, and in a few trenchant sentences exposed their blind and bigoted sophistries (vv. 30-3). The scene ends in his excommunication, but there is no doubt with whom remains the victory.

4. *The Spiritual Result* (vv. 35-41).—When Jesus heard that they had cast him out, He sought him, put to him the question suggesting faith in a Divine Redeemer, declared Himself to be that Saviour, and received the confession and adoration of His now enlightened disciple (vv. 35-8). In its closing verses this chapter shows us the Light of the World as Judge and Condemner of those who think they see, as well as Healer of the blind (vv. 39-41). The whole chapter shows modern criticism its own portrait.

XXV. The Woman with a Spirit of Infirmary and the Dropsical Man (Luke xiii. 10-17; xiv. 1-6).

These two miracles may be taken together for two reasons. They are both Sabbath day healings, and they introduce the last group of our Lord's Healing Miracles—scattered incidents in a tour of travel, "when the days were well-nigh come that He should

be received up" (Luke ix. 51, R.V.). The first of the incidents before us took place as He taught in a synagogue on the Sabbath day; the second on another Sabbath, when He went to eat bread in the house of a chief Pharisee. This reminds us of the comparative prominence and frequency of these Sabbath day cures. By working so many of His miracles on this day, Jesus consecrated it to the purposes of His Gospel. Note also that several of the Sabbath cures were wrought before the worshippers in the place where prayer was wont to be made. It was a reward to these diseased ones, who, in spite of their ailments, were found in God's house on the sacred day, that they should there meet their Deliverer.

I. Vv. 11-3. That this woman had "a spirit of infirmity" does not mean that she was of a weak and infirm spirit. The phrase denotes that her disease was one of those mysterious derangements of the nervous system having their rise in the mind rather than in the body. Her habitual attendance at the synagogue, the Lord's title for her, "a daughter of Abraham," probably meant to point her out as of the inner circle of pious Israelites "waiting for the consolation of Israel" (ii. 25)—and her thanksgiving to God when she was healed, all forbid the supposition that she was "possessed" by an evil spirit. The sufferer did not apply to Jesus for healing. She was at the synagogue because it was her wont. There is no indication that she knew Him before, far less knew that He would be in the synagogue that day. There, as she sat bent prone in her place, His gracious words won her prepared heart. He

saw her, and singled her out for a signal instance of His mercy. Her bent form and furrowed face were to Him as a book in which He read the story of her eighteen years' bondage and patient struggle to sustain her infirmity. Her faithful attendance on Divine worship, and perhaps other features to which we have no clue, showed Him her genuine religious and spiritual character. He called her to Him, and spoke the word of liberation: "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity." Then He laid His hands upon her, and immediately she was cured. And as she rose erect, her grateful piety broke forth into an irrepressible thanksgiving, a voluntary act of praise before all the people.

Vv. 14-17. The scene had become offensive to the narrow mind of the presiding elder. He had probably hoped that no conflict of opinion would arise on this occasion from Jesus' setting aside Pharisaic opinion as to Sabbath work. But that the daring Innovator should perform one of His Sabbath-breaking cures in the place of worship where he ruled was too much for him. Not daring to attack either the Lord Himself, or even the woman, in a covert and cowardly manner he spoke at them both (v. 14). Jesus answered him with a well-merited rebuke (vv. 15, 16), which completely shut the mouths of His adversaries, and heightened the admiration of the hearers.

What good cheer is in this story for those who, amid bodily infirmities, mental oppression, or household burdens and afflictions find their way statedly to God's house.

2. Luke xiv. 1. Marvellous kindness and patience

were shown on His part towards those who lay in wait to see if He would commit Himself by any deed or word through which they might accuse Him.

Ver. 2. Probably this man was placed here by envious design—unconsciously on his own part. But if the host and his co-religionists had laid a trap for their Guest, the result must have astonished them. The man was healed, and the spirit of the Sabbath expounded with surpassing breadth and force. Vv. 3, 4. The man was so placed as to be in view of all, and they were watching if Jesus would again offend. He goes straight to the mark, opens the topic Himself, and anticipates their objections, appealing to their conscience, charity, and religion,—not as loaded with senseless human additions, but as it stood in the intent of the Lawgiver (v. 3). They were silenced, for no answer but one could be given to the question thus put. He acted on the consent implied in their silence, took the man, laid His hands on him, rid him of his disease, and allowed him to withdraw before resuming the conversation.

Vv. 5, 6. "*And He said, . . . Which of you shall have an ass?*" [R.V. margin, *a Son*, etc.]. As on the immediately preceding occasion, His appeal to themselves against themselves is irresistible. The aptness of the parallel should be noticed. In the former story there was an evident fitness between the illustration chosen—the loosing of an ox or ass from the stall—and the loosing of a believing woman from her eighteen years' curvature. Here, an animal fallen into a pit was the appropriate parallel to a man in danger of death from dropsy ;

the "much more" being equally cogent in both cases. And again, as at the close of the former encounter, His adversaries were reduced to shame and silence, the people no doubt again rejoicing in the glorious things done by Him.

In passing from this, the last of the Sabbath healings, let us sum up the teaching derived from them. We see that Jesus took pains to emphasize the humane element in the original institution as a day of rest, rescuing it from the exaggerations of Pharisaism. Also He gave it the sanction of His observance as a day of public worship. But note further, that by these deeds of healing He honoured it specially as a day for showing mercy. The Lord's Day is consecrated by His Spirit for the service of man, as well as for the worship of God.

XXVI. Ten Lepers Cleansed (Luke xvii. 11-19).

Our Lord is on His last pilgrimage to Jerusalem. His route is described as being through the midst of Samaria and Galilee, probably meaning that He travelled on the borders of these countries, between the two. One day, as He is approaching a village, ten men rush forward to meet Jesus and His company—a piteous group, with clothes rent, heads bared, and hair dishevelled, a cloth bound strangely on the lower face and upper lip. They cannot enter the village, so waylay Him at the entrance of it. They dared not approach clean people within a certain measured distance. Therefore they "stood afar off," and lifted up their voice as one man, a voice of earnest and solemn entreaty, "*Jesus! Master! have mercy on us.*" The Lord's treatment of this case is

almost exactly the opposite of that of the first subject of His cleansing power. No touch is laid on the lepers, no healing word spoken ; but at once, "*when He saw them, He said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests.*" This treatment was quite in accord with the assurance implied in their cry, which only did justice to His now well-known and established reputation.

1. Thus was their *faith tested*. And their confidence in Jesus was equal to the test. They felt, as yet, no change in their diseased bodies, but they went, believing that the thing would be done. We can see them going steadily on together in all their rags, wretchedness, and uncleanness. But as they went, soon a cry of joy broke from one and another and another. The cure had come. New life shot into their wasted frames ; their flesh became clean as a little child's, and each saw in his fellows the wonderful transformation which he felt in himself. "*It came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.*" These men took Jesus at His word, and they soon realised the blessedness of so doing. Constantly we stumble at the simplicity of this act of faith—trusting the bare word of God ; we will trust no further than we can see or feel. Christ's method of salvation is not that we first feel ourselves to be healed and then believe in Him as our Healer. His prime requirement is to be trusted. "Look unto Me and be saved."

2. Jesus' treatment of these ten lepers had in one respect tested their faith, but it was further intended to *test their love*—to bring out whether their faith was trust in Him as God's representative to them,

or a mere formal faith in His office as a healer. When diseased ones were healed instantly by Jesus, and were still before Him, they could not withhold their acknowledgment. In this case it proved different, for only one stood the test (vv. 15, 16). As soon as he felt that he was whole, this man's heart rushed back to the Deliverer, and he was speedily prostrate at Jesus' feet in adoring praise. Jesus had bid them go to the priests, but this man counted the spirit of the command more than the letter, so he turned back, that he might go straight to the Healer, and in Him to God. Long before he reached the spot where Jesus and the disciples were, his glad notes were heard—he was not ashamed that all should know the story of his cleansing. This exception was himself the outcast among these outcasts. Jesus remarks that it was “the alien” alone who was grateful.

As to the others, it is possible that, finding themselves cured, they took no further steps at all, but proceeded at once to obliterate all traces of their ever having been lepers—a course which would preclude their returning to Jesus. More likely, they went on to the priests, and being officially declared to be clean, were charged to take no further notice of the Healer. Thus we see that they thought more of themselves than of their Deliverer ; how apt a type of multitudes who externally profit by the name of Christ !

Vv. 17-9. The nine had that outside faith which sufficed to trust His word for healing, but they had no regard either to the Divine glory or redeeming might of Jesus. On the other hand, He recognised

the thankful Samaritan as a true believer. His faith was a living tie between his soul and Christ. The cure was confirmed by Jesus' word, and to it was added the moral cure—a pronounced salvation.

XXVII. Blind Bartimeus (Matt. xx. 29-34 ; Mark x. 46-52 ; Luke xviii. 35-43).

Matthew speaks of two blind men. Mark dwells upon one, and says it was that well-known blind man, Bartimeus, the son of Timeus. The scene of this miracle was Jericho. Jesus is departing thence, accompanied by the disciples and a large number of people—forming an orderly procession. This blind man by the wayside is in his usual place. Begging is his usual occupation, but to-day another idea fills his mind. It has become clear to him that Jesus of Nazareth, of whom he has heard so much, is the Christ promised to the Fathers. He is prepared to confess his faith in Him, for he has a great boon to ask of Him. Watching, with feverish anxiety, for the first sign of His approach, he at length hears the tramp of a great multitude—it comes nearer and nearer. He asks the bystanders, or first-comers, "*What it meant?*" and is told that "*Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.*" Now his opportunity has come, and he lifts up his voice: "*Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.*" Note what obstacles this man's faith overcame.

I. *His circumstances.*—He was but a poor blind man, a customary object of charity. He who was passing by was a great Teacher, reputed to be the Messiah—probably the future King of Israel. But Bartimeus made nothing of the difference of rank

between himself and Jesus. As to the engrossment of Jesus, or the crowd surrounding Him, the faith of this man made that rather a help than a hindrance. What better could he wish than to be in the way when Jesus of Nazareth passes by? If anyone is hindered from coming to Christ by considerations of environment, be this faith's answer: The worse your circumstances, the more need you have of Christ, the more evident is it that you are of those to whom He is offered. When He is nigh, dismiss all argument that the time is unsuitable, or that there may be a more convenient season.

2. *The desire of worldly advantage.*—In an ordinary case Bartimeus would doubtless have laid himself out to make a harvest out of the procession. But he deliberately sacrificed the alms-getting for the eyesight. No doubt he would have been a fool to do otherwise. Yet men are committing this folly every day; they are too busy in the world to seek salvation, or too much afraid of losing present advantage to set aside its claims and “count the cost” of their immortal nature. But a soul in earnest—prepared for the Master's grace, will cause everything else to stand aside till this great question be settled.

3. *The opposition of others.*—Bartimeus began his cry as soon as he was told what the approaching footsteps meant, and kept it up till the foremost part of the procession reached him. And the rebukes of those around did not silence him; many charged him to hold his peace, “*but he cried out the more a great deal.*” We are not told what were the motives of the crowd in trying to silence Bartimeus.

Perhaps the notion that a common beggar like him must not take up the time and attention of Jesus ; perhaps he displeased them by the boldness of his expression that Jesus was the Christ. It is a hard stumbling-block in the way of the spiritually anxious, when professing or even real Christians object to their ardour or show of feeling. But if such anxious ones are really led of God the water of discouragement flung on the flame of their desire will only make it burn higher and hotter, for He who moves their hearts is secretly pouring oil upon that heavenly flame. And when at length Jesus bade Bartimeus come to Him, the same crowd that had discouraged the petitioner cheered him on.

Now the procession has reached the point where Jesus Himself comes opposite Bartimeus. As soon as the cry meets the Saviour's ear, He comes to a standstill, and turns from the happy throng surrounding Him to the one miserable man who needs His help. How Bartimeus springs to his feet when told that the Saviour is calling him ; tossing from him the wrapper with which he protected himself from the weather, "*Casting away his garment, he rose, and came to Jesus*" (Mark x. 50). And to what a Saviour he has come (v. 51)! No doubt Jesus knew what he wanted ; but He will have him tell it out, that in the fuller exercise of his faith he may be more prepared to receive the blessing. The pertinacious vitality of faith proved itself in this instance, and met with an instant and abundant reward (v. 52). And the proof was crowned by the first use he made of the new gift of sight. He left his alms, forgot his garment, and "followed Jesus in the way."

XXVIII. The Raising of Lazarus (John xi. 1-44).

The steps which lead up, through the narrative, to the miracle itself, are these: Jesus' message to the sisters on hearing of Lazarus' sickness (v. 4). Then in conversation with the disciples He gives the hint of a special intention (v. 11). Then comes the conversation with Martha (vv. 21-27).

Vv. 35-7. It is as Jesus moves along towards the grave of Lazarus that His tears flow, and the sight suggests two opposite remarks made probably by oppositely-minded parties. "Behold how He loved Him!"—a valuable testimony to the naturalness of His human emotions. By others, these tears are accepted as evidence that He had no power to do more than weep (v. 37).

Ver. 38. The groan was wrung from Him doubtless partly by these words of unbelief just uttered. But the emotion here expressed has several sources. The sorrow of the sisters drew out His sympathy, the murmurs of the Jews chafed His spirit, but deeper still was the indignation felt by the Lord of Life at that which sin had wrought. When Jesus orders the stone at the entrance of the vault to be rolled away, Martha interposes. Perhaps she surmises that Jesus means to do something; but a feeling of the glaring impossibility of it gets the better of her. It is just her former cry (v. 21), and Jesus reminds her of His former implied promise (v. 40).

Ver. 41. *a.* He employed natural means to remove natural obstructions, that Divine power might come face to face with the supernatural element. To have done these other things without means would only

have added something of prodigy to miracle, which Jesus never did. This principle is pointedly applicable to the kingdom of grace. The new heart is a Divine gift, but He bids you "take away the stone." Remove ignorance, root up bad habits, implant good ones, give your children Christian education Ver. 41. *b.* The company gathers round Him with a solemn awe. He lifts up His eyes to heaven and addresses God, using no names of worship, but simply saying, "Father!" He gives thanks for the prayer already granted.

Ver. 42. The miracle itself was overwhelming as a proof of power with God. But this thanksgiving to God, and the name by which He calls Him—would give an impression to the witnesses of the Son of the Father, the Sent of God.

Vv. 43, 44. More exactly what He cried was, "Lazarus! hither! forth!" The great voice or shout, from One who was wont to speak so gently, thrilled the heart of every listener. The echo of the cry had hardly ceased, when a figure stood sharply outlined against the gloom in the mouth of the sepulchre; in a moment more he sprang forward, eager to throw himself at his Redeemer's feet. At the word of Jesus, "*they loose him and let him go.*" This miracle is equally noteworthy whether regarded as a *symbol* or a *witness*.

I. It was an eminent *symbol* of Christ's regenerating and soul-quickenings work, both in the details and in the substance. The sinner is dead, buried, already corrupt and loathsome. Christ comes to the sinner's tomb. He bids His servants ply all preliminary means; but there can be no life till He

Himself calls. Then, at His cry, the dead lives, the soul is converted, and once more the use of means comes in. Let the living help their new-raised brother. Let us note that the hinge of comparison between the spiritual and the literal resurrection is that the moving power of both is God manifest in Jesus Christ.

2. This act is a supreme *witness* to the Divinity and glory of Jesus. It was done in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, in the broadest day, in the greatest publicity. The subject of the miracle himself was in evidence—lived for years afterwards. By this stupendous deed Jesus' claim to be the Christ was brought to a climax. Those who opposed His claims had no longer any excuse for doubt—it became hostile denial; His followers were confirmed beyond the possibility of doubt. This narrative is the key to the whole story of our Lord's Last Days and Passion, for it explains how His entire ministry was brought to a crisis.

XXIX. The Withering of the Fig Tree (Matt. xxi. 17-22; Mark xi. 12-14, 20-24).

This incident stands alone among the miracles as the only one not of a merciful or beneficent character. It was a symbol or prediction of judgment, hardly falling within the class of miracles. It was an acted parable.

The last stage of the Lord's ministry has been reached. He is passing along the way from Bethany towards the capital, His heart full of the disappointment and sorrow excited by the retrospect of His three years' ministry. And the forecast of the final

rejection of Him by the people mingles with the forecast of their doom as a Church and nation. Many fig-trees lined the slopes along which Jesus and the disciples were passing. It was April—not the ordinary time for even the earliest to have fruit; but one tree shone out in a precocious glow of glossy leaves, and as the fruit usually precedes the foliage in this tree, the inference was natural. But when the tree was reached it was found to bear “nothing but leaves.” The prophetic temperature of the moment makes itself felt in the mode of the narrative. *“And He answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit from thee henceforward for ever.”* And the next day they saw, in passing the spot, the fig tree *“withered away from the roots.”* Peter reminded his Master of the words spoken the morning before, and not only emphasized their fulfilment, but elicited an explanation. The withering of that tree was a result of faith in God. Let the disciples but have such faith, and to them it shall be given to do greater things than these (Matt. xxi. 21-22).

The words which justify the symbolic application of the incident to the downfall of the Jewish nation and Church are not literally given. But they are easily read between the lines of Christ’s answer to Peter, and there is besides much in the cognate passages of the gospels to help us to the meaning. Several months before, Jesus had thrown into one of His parables all the force of a vision or prophecy (Luke xiii. 1-9). This was judgment, but judgment which might possibly be averted; and the apologue ends with the proposal of the vine-dresser, that there might be another year of respite, and that in the

event of failure this should be final. To the men who stood by the fruitless fig-tree that morning, no words were needed to carry home the sad conclusion. The year of grace had passed in vain. They expected no words—being accustomed to read His mind in such symbolic actions.

Our Lord assures the disciples that the result of moving this mountain should be granted to their prayer of faith. This can be read as a veiled prediction that the transference of God's kingdom from the unworthy nation (Matt. xxi. 43) should take place through their ministry ; and even the removal of the mountain of Gentile prejudice and pagan idolatry. Be this as it may, the force of the original action remains. Three years the Lord Christ had sought fruit on this fair tree of the Jewish Church and people. But it failed. The tree full of leaves proved to be void of fruit. And as that withered tree stood in sight of all who passed, so stands Israel herself, the open scorn of the world—Judaism, a dead and fruitless religion ; a monument of Divine judgment.

XXX. The Second Miraculous Draught of Fishes

(John xxi. 1-14).

This is the only incident after His resurrection which can be classed with our Lord's former mighty deeds. It closes the series of symbolic acts of power by which Jesus on earth sealed His ministry. It was the third time that Jesus showed Himself to His disciples, as a company, after He was risen. They had not at once left Jerusalem for Galilee, as they were instructed by the Resurrection Angel to do, and even now they had not gone straight to the

mountain of rendezvous, but were lingering by their familiar haunts, and were engaged in their old employment of fishing when He came. Let us note—

1. *The manner of His Coming.*—They had toiled all night with no success, and in the morning are drawing near the shore. A stranger addresses them : “ *Children—lads—have ye any meat?* ” Some traveller, doubtless, who would buy fish of them,—but they have nothing to give him (v. 5). “ *Cast the net,* ” He said, “ *on the right side of the ship.* ” They knew not the Speaker, yet they could not but do what He bade ; then the mystery was solved, for “ *they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.* ” The truth flashed into John’s mind, and it was like a sudden recollection ; though years had elapsed, it all comes back to him, and he breathes the discovery to Peter, “ *It is the Lord.* ” Peter needs no more to act straightway like himself (v. 7). How like themselves are both these disciples. John is the Seer, the lover, the teacher ; but Peter is the doer, and we have always these two classes—the men of faith, the men of action. The Church’s eyes and the Church’s hands—all helpful to one another and needful for the body.

The others get to the beach too in time, eager to see this Stranger of whom every heart now holds a recognition, though the eye cannot attest that it is He. A fire is burning on the shore, and fish laid thereon, and bread. When Jesus met them in the upper room first after His rising, He partook of their meal. Now He provides for them as they return from their night’s work. But they are not to

stand and gaze in mere wonder (vv. 10, 11). Their work done, He calls them to the morning meal (v. 12). As they sit round the fire and share His provision and their own, and He blesses, breaks, and parts it, they can no longer refuse the assent of their whole heart. "This is Jesus once again!" (v. 12 *b.*). But where was the need of asking Him? Because there is some change towards glory, which marks this and almost all the Post-resurrection appearances, so that the senses are puzzled. Consequently it is upon the evidence of mind and heart, rather than sense that they know Him to be their risen Saviour.

2. *The meaning of the Miracle.*—After Christ's resurrection there was no need of any mere act of power to convince the disciples of His Godhead. But they needed two things. One was to get proof upon proof that Jesus was really risen; the other, to learn how they should do His work when He was gone away into heaven. This story supplies both these things. (1) It proved in a very striking way that it was their own Jesus who rose from the dead. He addressed here their memory and their faith—doing again exactly as He had done before, on that very lake, the works no other man could do. This is the highest kind of proof for the identity of the risen One. (2) It was also a symbol of their future work. The first miraculous draught was as much a parable as a miracle (Luke v. 1-11). Would not these men feel in their deepest hearts the meaning of this repeated sign from their risen Lord? In these closing interviews He was preparing them for the great work of carrying His Gospel into all the

earth. He would be no longer with them in bodily presence. Many a night, dark and dreary, they would have to toil profitless ; but as oft as He should command, the net would be filled. At last, they would draw it to land, the success of His kingdom would be complete and glorious beyond all expression. His faithful servants would enter into their rest followed by their works, and would sit down to meat with Him in His everlasting kingdom.

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